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**Around the World in
Pieds-à-Terre**
By Wendy Goodman p.78

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Saving Reddit From Itself By Benjamin Wallace p.52 / **A \$2 Million Literary Debut** By Boris Kachka p.44

**A Black President
in the Age of
#BlackLivesMatter**
By
Jennifer
Senior

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Times Square:

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By Adam Sternbergh



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WATCHING THIS 'VIEW' IS LIKE WATCHING
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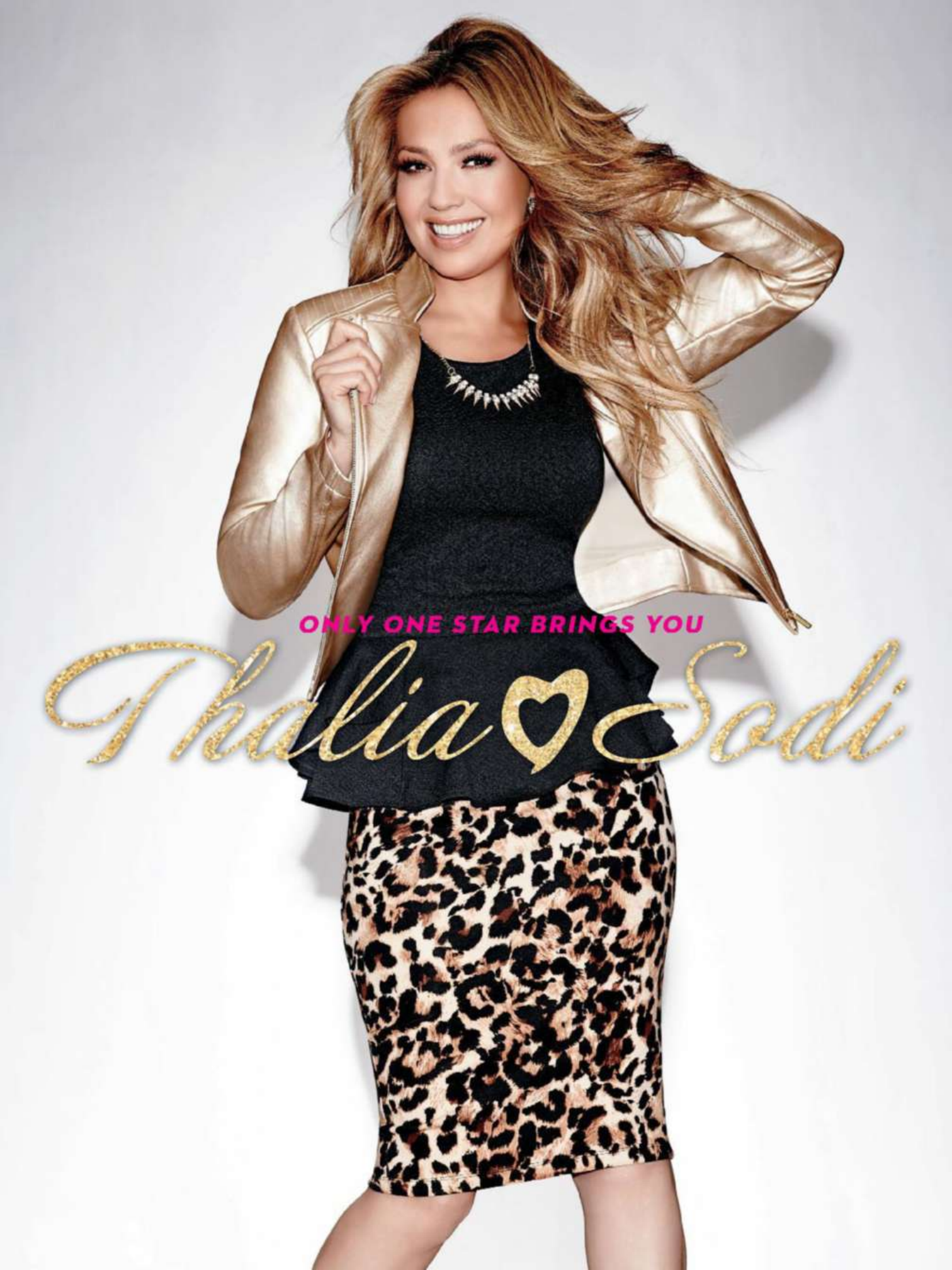
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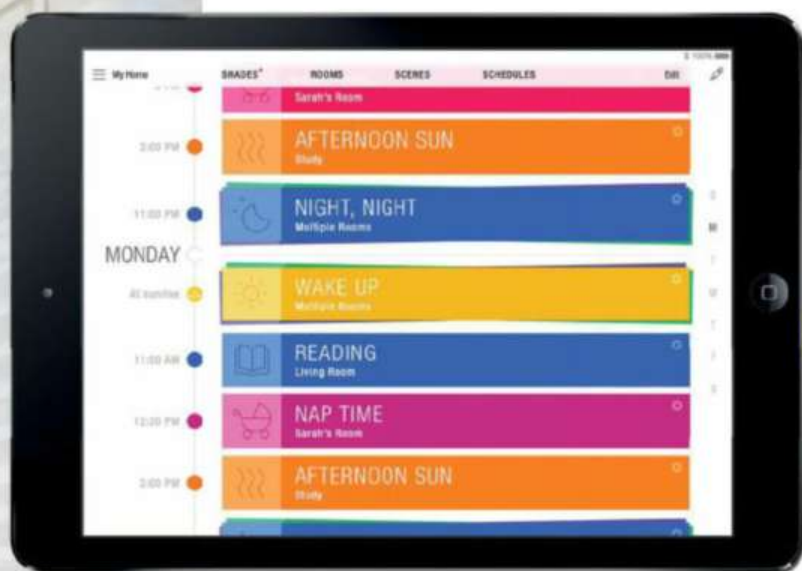
A full-body promotional photograph of the singer Thalia Sodi. She is standing against a plain white background, smiling and looking towards the camera. She has long, wavy, light brown hair. She is wearing a shiny, metallic gold leather jacket over a black, long-sleeved, form-fitting top with a ruffled hem. A black and gold leopard print skirt is worn over the top. She is also wearing a silver necklace with a row of pointed, tooth-like pendants. Her right hand is holding the lapel of her jacket, and her left hand is behind her head. The text "ONLY ONE STAR BRINGS YOU" is printed in pink capital letters across the middle of her torso. Below this, the name "Thalia Sodi" is written in a large, gold, cursive script, with a gold heart symbol replacing the letter 'i' in "Thalia".

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Thalia Sodi



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*Allama in Times
Square in 1957.*



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Photo-illustration by Bobby Doherty. This page, Keira Knightley as Thérèse Raquin. Photograph by Erik Madigan Heck for New York Magazine.

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SHE'S A LADY

A full-body portrait of Amy Schumer. She is wearing a grey pinstripe double-breasted suit with a white shirt and a dark tie. Her hair is blonde and styled in a messy bun. She is holding a glass of red wine to her lips with her right hand and a lit cigar in her left hand. She is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression.

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Comments



1 “Far from destroying our democracy,” writes Frank Rich in last issue’s cover story on the importance of Donald Trump, “he’s exposing all its phoniness and corruption in ways as serious as he is not. And changing it in the process” (“**Donald Trump Is Saving Our Democracy**,” September 21–October 4). “The best writer on the confluence of pop culture & politics,” tweeted ProPublica’s Jesse Eisinger. Other readers agreed that Rich gave needed insight into Trump’s impact on presidential politics. “Whatever his motivation, whatever his intention,” wrote commenter RonnieG, Trump “**is playing devil’s advocate to both parties and exposing weaknesses, contradictions, and outright cruelty and injustice in a whole host of current U.S. policies and prejudices.**” That exposure will hopefully prove to be invaluable fodder for change in both sides—and not necessarily or even remotely in the direction of Trump’s supposed positions.” “In one amazing feat,” tweeted Jennifer Kates, Rich “**distills the Trump shitshow and alchemizes it into a reason to be hopeful.**” Blogger Steve M. at No More Mister Nice Blog felt Rich was giving Trump too much credit. Rich, he wrote, is “paving the way for what I fear is the inevitable ‘reassessment’ phase of the Trump era, when the smart set will stop mocking the man and start writing pieces with titles like ‘Taking Donald Trump Seriously.’” *Esquire*’s Charles P. Pierce agreed. “How exactly does Trump’s tasteless flaunting of his wealth work against the politics created by the destruction of our tepid campaign-finance laws? ... Does Rich think that the people are supporting

Trump because of their disgust with money in politics? Or because they realize that all politics is a sham of a façade?” Other readers marveled at the cover photo-illustration, which featured Donald Trump in a powdered wig, cravat, and waistcoat. “**A thing of beauty—or nightmares.** I can’t decide which,” tweeted Talking Points Memo’s Nick Martin.

2 Alex Morris’s story on the spouses of trans women sparked an intense and emotional conversation about those who choose to leave a transitioning partner (“**My Husband Is Now My Wife**,” September 21–October 4). “It only seems to be wives who get judged for leaving,” wrote Cuttlefish12. “Men don’t stick around. No one judges them because apparently asking a man to consider a gay relationship is inconceivable while asking a woman to suddenly become a lesbian is normal ... Many [trans women] get to have the wife at home raising their kids while they pursue their career. I don’t think it’s at all surprising that many of these wives are bitter and angry. I just hope that with greater awareness and acceptance of trans people, more trans women and men can begin living authentically much, much earlier as many young people are doing today.” “When I transitioned, my wife left me,” wrote alison.hudson. “I completely understood why. We share custody of our kids, who were 2, 5, and 9 when I started transitioning ... **If anything, my relationship with them is far better than it was when I was ‘Dad,’** especially since I was angry and bitter and depressed then. I am active in their lives; I walk them to school, help

them with their homework, take them to the movies on weekends, and do my best to nurture them and raise them into decent adults. My son—the oldest and the one who remembers the most from ‘before’—has told me more than once that he likes me more now than he did then, and that he’s glad I transitioned so I could be happy. I generally agree with you about the hope from increasing acceptance and transition earlier in life. But for those of us who were denied that, don’t assume the transitioning of a parent is automatically a bad thing.” Many more transgender individuals contributed to the discussion, including commenter chrissie.see: “As someone in transition right now, someone whose marriage suffered in precisely this way, and someone whose children are, like their mother, confronting the issues raised by my changes, **I found this article unflinchingly honest, even to the point of being uncomfortable.** Transition does bring changes in more than just the bodies of those who travel this road, and while that won’t likely alter the paths on which we find ourselves, we should—and most of us do—remember that, and, on some level, regret that it isn’t easier on those we love.”

3 “How Has Chinatown Stayed Chinatown?” asked Nick Tabor in his story on the neighborhood that has “largely resisted the laws of the real-estate market” (**September 21–October 4**). One Chinatown native, Ham07, disputed Tabor’s reporting that Chinatown hasn’t changed. “Gentrification is happening ... the building where my parents live was sold to a big real-estate company and half the building’s rent-stabilized tenants got moved out by threat or payoff. This happened quickly, all within six months’ time. This developer actually has an internet ad in Chinese, seeking buildings in Chinatown, and no, it is not a Chinese-owned real-estate company ... Sad to see lower Manhattan will eventually lose a cultural icon.” Paul.cantor thought the story should have addressed the role of organized crime. “There’s a quiet organized-crime element in Chinatown that really keeps things humming along. It should come as no surprise that the minute the Italian mob got squeezed out of Little Italy, gentrification became a problem. **The one good thing the ‘old’ New York had was that it regulated itself.** Leaving things up to city government will lead you nowhere.”

CORRECTION: Wig-styling for the Trump cover (**September 21–October 4**) was by Sharelle Roberts for Raffaele Mollica.

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Intelligencer

INSIDE: *Four moguls, one siesta / James Earl Jones and Cicely Tyson reunite / David Wallace-Wells on your mixed-up DNA*



The National Interest: Jonathan Chait

The House's Right
Flank Finally
Got Boehner's Scalp
So why doesn't
it feel good?

ON JULY 14, a conservative group began releasing a series of undercover videos showing officials from Planned Parenthood negotiating, in blunt and sometimes callous terms, the sale of fetal tissue for medical research. The videos set off a chain of events that culminated, strangely enough, in John Boehner's resignation as Speaker of the House of Representatives. And so a journalistic sting operation intended to expose the alleged depravity of social liberalism instead wound up exposing the fragile psyche of the American right, which remains unable to handle the realities of holding partial power in a divided government without regularly freaking out.

The intermediary steps in that bizarre sequence involved a now-familiar procession of political rituals. The videos instantly catapulted Planned Parenthood to the top of conservative activists' hierarchy of intolerable evil, thus triggering an ingrained response to shut down the federal government, as had been threatened over Obama's immigration policies and carried out over Obamacare. Most Republicans, including Boehner, regarded

this plan as horrendously misguided. Some recent NBC-*Wall Street Journal* poll numbers help explain their reluctance. Americans dislike the Republican Party quite a lot: Only 29 percent view it favorably, 45 percent unfavorably. They regard President Obama more favorably (46-40) and Planned Parenthood more favorably still (47-31). Another poll found that only a fifth of the public would rather shut down Washington than maintain funding for Planned Parenthood. The proposed strategy—an unpopular party using an unpopular tactic against a popular president in order to defund a popular organization—understandably struck Boehner as ill-advised.

Faced with the Speaker's reluctance to join in their suicidal gesture du jour, his tormentors resorted to the only leverage at their disposal: threatening to depose him. (Boehner's party controls 247 of 435 seats, meaning a defection of just 29 agitated Republicans could, in theory, take the gavel out of his hand.) The ritual of demands, threats, and nervous pacification proceeded much as it has many times before, until it climaxed with Boehner's unexpected announcement that they could take this job and shove it.

This was something new. The activists in the House had not just flexed their muscles but achieved a win. Far from delivering them a cherished victory, however, Boehner's announced resignation threw the rebels into disarray. This became clear in the ensuing days, during the succession struggle over the party leadership. The activists briefly rallied around Daniel Webster, a Floridian, as a potential Speaker, an effort that quickly collapsed. When Kevin McCarthy, the incumbent majority leader, solidified his position to succeed Boehner, some insurgents mustered a brief flurry of enthusiasm for Trey Gowdy of South Carolina to fill McCarthy's job. Gowdy decided instead to stay in the comfort of his chairmanship of the Benghazi Committee. Tellingly, neither Webster's or Gowdy's supporters expressed any belief their leadership would fulfill the demand that precipitated Boehner's resignation. (For those who have already lost the thread, that would be shutting down the government over Planned Parenthood.)

The disappearance of the issue that had triggered the entire meltdown provided an important clue to the unusual nature of the confrontation. The rift dividing Boehner and his antagonists was not ideological or even necessarily substantive, and the rebel demands were not merely extreme—they were implacable.

Anti-Boehner Republicans described themselves as “conservatives.” (Representative Walter Jones: “I don't really know Kevin [McCarthy] that well, but I know that conservatives are not ready to have him.”) But Boehner is also a conservative—barely less so, if at all, than his opponents. He came to power in the House as an original lieutenant of Newt Gingrich, who helped Republicans discover that their party's only chance of power lay in withholding cooperation and instead attacking the Democratic majority. Boehner vociferously opposed all of Obama's major undertakings during the president's first two years in office, and when he became Speaker, he advocated for their repeal and advanced proposals that would roll policy dramatically in the opposite direction. Major legislation ground to a halt, with the two parties at odds on health care, taxes, regulation, and the general role of government.

That is to say that, contrary to the recriminations of Boehner's Republican critics and the nostalgia-tinged accolades heaped on him by moderates, Boehner did not preside

over an era of compromise or bipartisanship. The overwhelming thrust of his tenure was one of obstruction. But obstructionism meant stalemate, and stalemate meant maintaining the status quo. Having deemed the status quo after two years of Obamaism a socialist monstrosity, the rebels demanded that the GOP bend the president to its will. Lacking the two-thirds majority required in both chambers to override a veto, however, it never had a chance to do this. None of which prevented bitter recriminations. The ultimate source of right-wing anger at Boehner was the Obama administration's continued existence.

Fury over not having enough power to force your leader to wield more power than is constitutionally possible is not an emotional state conducive to stable coalition-building. Over the years, right-wing discontent has sundered the party into a number of ever-shifting sub-factions. The “Republican Study Committee” used to serve as headquarters for those most dedicated to annoying their party's leaders. In 2010, the “Tea Party Caucus” formed, overshadowing the RSC before fading away. This past January, believing the ranks of the RSC had swollen with too many halfhearted members, a core of true believers split off to form the “Freedom Caucus.” Perhaps eventually the Freedom Caucus will give way to a Blood-Dimmed Tide Is Loosed Coalition.

Like the Weather Underground of the '70s, the Freedom Caucus keeps the identity of most of its members secret. Around 40 representatives are believed to belong, though only nine publicly disclose their membership. “It's like *Fight Club*,” said Jim Bridenstine, one of the nine. David Frum, a moderate-conservative commentator, has mockingly summed up the beliefs of these fundamentalists as “If people don't appreciate what we are saying, then say it louder,” but the Freedom Caucus's most specific strategic contribution is literally that. “Many members want the leadership to be more vocal across the board,” Ted Poe of Texas explained to the *Washington Post*. “Things we bring up need to have more enthusiasm. Back home, they wouldn't mind a little more fire and brimstone.”

In 2011, during a strangely pervasive swell of dissatisfaction among Barack Obama's erstwhile supporters, I wrote that liberals have trouble handling authority. In general, we are much more comfortable fantasizing about power; the sensation of holding and using it seems to unsettle us, and we curl into ourselves with disappointment. Conservatives displayed far less grumpiness toward George W. Bush than liberals have toward Obama until the very end, when Bush's presidency collapsed so irretrievably the right had to hastily abandon its largely worshipful pose and write him out of the conservative tradition in order to contain the fallout.

Conservatives in the Freedom Caucus suffer from a similar but different problem: They do not seem capable of comprehending a world in which they exert less than total power. This failure to compute leads to bursts of angry behavior that is ineffectual by design. No scalp will satisfy, not when any new head starts to look like another scalp. No Freedom Caucus member who finds himself in the party leadership can be anything but a sellout, since betrayal is the only explanation for the failure of the right-wing agenda.

Last week, House Republicans met to plan their post-Boehner future and came away with nothing more than a generalized agreement as to the need to be “more aggressive” and “play offense.” Representative Carlos Curbelo told the *Washington Post*, “It was a therapy session.” Therapy, not a new Speaker, may be exactly what Republicans need. ■

Next Up!

“Rep. Kevin McCarthy is a ‘nice guy’ but that doesn't mean he is qualified or conservative enough to lead the people's House. Just like John Boehner, McCarthy scores terribly with conservatives. If McCarthy is chosen, we'll see that he's fired.”

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Barry Diller

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Sandy Gallin

Already the manager of Dolly Parton, Cher, and Richard Pryor, he was a few years away from signing the biggest pop star on Earth: Michael Jackson.

David Geffen

Had, the previous year, started Geffen Records, signing two huge artists: Donna Summer, at the height of her "Bad Girls" disco fame, and John Lennon, just before his comeback and subsequent assassination.

Caught: The Ultimate Power Nap

Four moguls in their prime, recharging.

WHEN SHE MADE this photograph in 1981, Kelly Rector was with her not-yet-husband Calvin Klein aboard the chartered yacht *Midnight Saga*. (The image appears in her new Rizzoli book, *Photographs by Kelly Klein*.) "It was a holiday—either Christmas or New Year's—in Mustique," she recalls. "Siesta time, after lunch. I just happened to be walking through—I carried my camera all the time, every day, on vacation, on the street. It was just a moment: I didn't think anything of it at the time." CHRISTOPHER BONANOS



78 MINUTES WITH ...

James Earl Jones and Cicely Tyson

A play about aging gracefully (and otherwise) reunites two stars with a whole lot of life experience.

BY BORIS KACHKA

WE'RE THE ONLY ones who come out here on visitors' day," says James Earl Jones in a farm-bred accent several notches folksier than the voices of CNN, Mufasa, and Darth Vader. He and Cicely Tyson are seated across a card table and surrounded by the accoutrements of old age—crutches, wheelchairs, and other flotsam. None of it belongs to Jones, who is 84, or Tyson, who doesn't give her

age but is reportedly 90. These are only props, strewn across the back half of a large rehearsal room on 42nd Street. Flynn Earl Jones, James's son and assistant, is sitting in a far corner of the room, looking over notes.

Behind the actors, a large piece of drywall stands in for the ramshackle nursing home whose front porch they'll occupy when the Broadway revival of *The Gin Game* opens on October 14. Though their offstage appearances tend

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/OCTOBER 13-25/

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to be black-tie (Tyson gets a Kennedy Center Honor in December; Jones already has one), today they are dressed for work—he in a gray blazer and sensible shoes, she in denim and a sequined U.S. Open cap. They’ve just rehearsed the second scene in D. L. Coburn’s 1977 Pulitzer Prize-winning play, in which two neglected old-timers seek solace over a pack of cards.

“It’s a very disturbing play to me,” says Tyson. Over several rounds of gin rummy—a game the actors are still getting the hang of—Tyson’s fragile Fonia repeatedly beats Jones’s Weller, a bombastic former businessman and self-styled master of the game. The luckier she gets, the nastier he becomes, threatening to destroy their nascent friendship and, perhaps, their images of themselves. “You think it’s a piece about playing cards, but it’s not,” says Tyson. “Because what you’re doing is delving into the personalities of two very sad, lonely people.”

It isn’t a very flattering portrait of old age—but then, asks Jones, “is there one?” Tyson and Jones seem to handle it uncommonly well. *The Gin Game* brings them back together on Broadway for the first time in 49 years. They met in Jean Genet’s early-’60s spectacle *The Blacks*, which did as much for the avant-garde as for racial diversity onstage. “If there’s a black actor you were to hear of in the next three decades, they were in that play,” says Jones.

Did their characters interact? “He was my lover,” Tyson says, pointing emphatically at Jones. Did they have chemistry? “It was *all* chemistry,” says Jones, and Tyson belts out a laugh. “It wasn’t so much the material as the things that went on while we were performing,” she says. “Every single night there was an incident of some kind, like someone running out in the middle of it. Somebody [from the audience] was carted away in an ambulance and taken to Bellevue. A play should be written about the performance and the cast of *The Blacks*.”

In 1966, Tyson and Jones reunited for a short-lived Broadway revue of black spirituals and readings. But the Great White Way was literally that, decades away from any meaningful African-American presence. “I remember, there was a production on Broadway called *Subways Are for Sleeping*,” says Jones. “You go see the musical, there were no ethnic people on the subway! We knew better. The cast of *The Blacks* rallied—‘Let’s go picket this fucker!’—but that wasn’t my thing. I was hoping I’d find something better to do, and I wasn’t good at it. To picket you must be able to articulate what your cause is, and I can’t always do that.”

Tyson took a more overtly political approach—not by carrying a picket sign

but by taking parts that articulated the cause. “I really could not afford the luxury of being an actress,” she says. “I had some issues that I really wanted to address, and I chose my career as a platform.” In the ’70s, her roles in *Souther* and *Roots* made her a civil-rights icon. Only over the past decade or so has she been willing to take roles that are less message-driven, partly because she feels that the opportunities have expanded. “I don’t have to point out to you what’s happened on television as far as blacks are concerned, virtually taking over,” she says. Shortly after our meeting, Viola Davis will become the first black winner of a Best Actress in a Drama Emmy for *How to Get Away With Murder*. Tyson was also nominated, for a guest role on the same show.

After their early collaborations, Tyson and Jones did two movies together in the ’70s. Since then, they’ve watched each other work: Jones has always admired Tyson’s “ability to take chances,” and she tries to catch everything he does: “I know the sensitivity of this being.” After two decades away, she returned to Broadway in 2013, spending two years (including a tour) in an African-American revival of Horton Foote’s *The Trip to Bountiful*. For years she’d asked her agent to “get me my *Trip to Bountiful*”—meaning a dramatic swan song akin to Geraldine Page’s turn in the 1985 movie—after which she would retire. Yet after taking that very role, Tyson kept going. “I wonder why people retire to do nothing,” she says. Her only experience with retirement homes comes from visiting friends and researching parts like this one.

Despite his audible majesty onscreen, Jones never left the theater and has lately been on a Broadway tear—six shows in ten years. One of those was *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, the second all-black Broadway revival he’s starred in. No matter the strides they and their peers have made, both actors believe such race-conscious productions

“I wonder why people retire to do nothing.”

remain necessary and valuable. “Ethnicity is still an important factor,” Jones says. “You look at the police issue in the young public, there’s a lot to be resolved. In fact, each political climate adds more junk to it than air ... Everybody sat back and waited for Obama to solve everything. Big mistake. That’s not what he was there for.”

“God bless him,” adds Tyson. But, she’s quick to note, *The Gin Game* is an essentially race-blind script: “Anybody can find themselves in this situation,” Jones concurs: “We all get old.” Coburn made a few revisions for this production, but his only major change was to make the characters older, accommodating both these particular actors and the fact that Fonia’s original age, 71, is practically in midlife now.

Tyson signed on to *The Gin Game* first—despite a few reservations about “the kind of language [Fonia] is forced to use”—and “when I read it, I thought, *Oh, God, this is James Earl Jones*. I couldn’t read it without hearing his voice, seeing his physical action.” She says she hasn’t yet found the core of Fonia, an apparently passive woman who’s nonetheless alienated all the men in her life. Jones is feeling surer-footed, thanks in part to a book his son gave him. “What is it called, Flynn?” Jones calls out. “The *DSM-5*,” Flynn responds—that is, the bible of psychiatric illnesses. “What we have is a person with a narcissistic disorder,” Jones continues. “Really, he’s a lot like Mr. Trump.”

Contra their roles, Jones is the pussycat in the room, Tyson the boisterous agitator. When I make the mistake of addressing them both as “you guys”—twice—she snaps: “He’s the guy. I’m the lady! What if I called you a gal?” Jones, by contrast, muses abstractly on any given subject, from gambling—to “inviting some spiritual force into the world”—to the real subject of *The Gin Game*. “We all maybe don’t get old alone,” he says, “but we do get old privately, within ourselves. We have to deal with the fact that time is closing and closing and closing in on you. I won’t say I look forward to dying, but I’m not at this moment afraid of it. There was a beginning once, and that was pretty darn exciting. And now I’ll have another, not similar but definitive, experience.”

Tyson may not be going so quietly. “Young people think they’re too smart to let those things happen to them,” she says, meaning “incarceration” in a nursing home. “But there are so many circumstances that allow people to fall into that situation. And time is the enemy. Time.” It hasn’t quite caught up with her. People keep sending Tyson scripts—“Broadway shows! Very attractive. But I’ve gotta deal with one thing at a time.” ■

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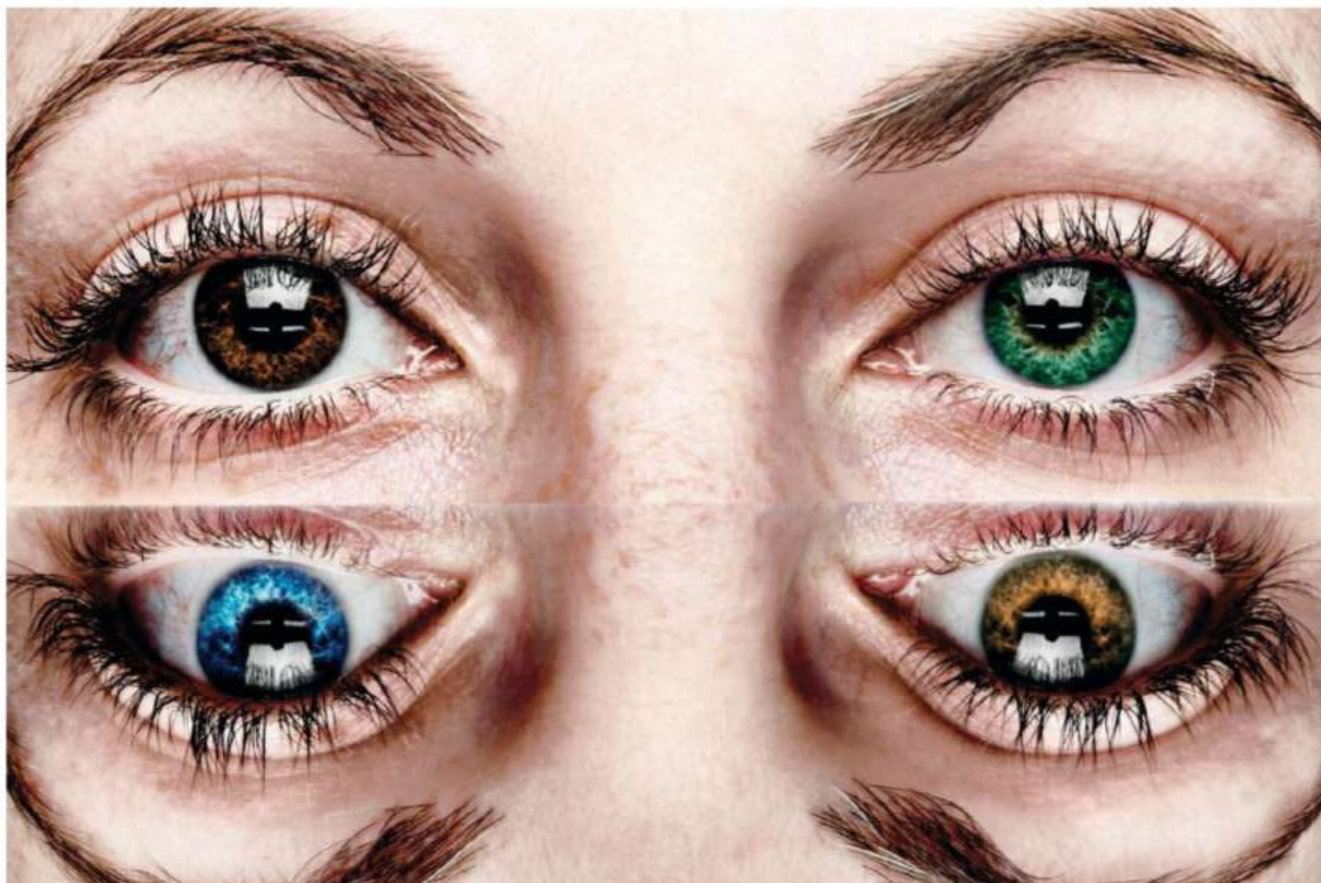
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Tomorrow: David Wallace-Wells

Maybe We're Not
Infested With Aliens
Maybe the aliens are
part of what makes us us.

IT IS NOT ONLY POSSIBLE, it has in fact happened that a woman who vaginally conceived a child, then vaginally delivered her, had Protective Services threaten to take the child when a maternity test showed she was not, in fact, the mother. Nor was she the mother of her second child, genetically. Or her third, whom she was still carrying throughout the dispute with her estranged boyfriend—the man who, those same tests proved, was definitively the father. Only later did Lydia Fairchild discover that the true mother of all three of her children was her twin—if *twin* is really the word for one human embryo more or less swallowed by another before birth. The eggs that produced those babies had been with Fairchild her whole life, but genetically they belonged to an unborn sister, unknown to her and even her parents, living on in small parts inside her—a phenomenon that poetic scientists have called “parasitic” or “vanishing” twins. These days, they tend to prefer “chimerism,” after the mythic beast assembled, like Frankenstein’s monster, from multiple



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animals. But, man, isn't that even creepier?

Don't relax—it's not just twins. In a new paper, "Humans As Superorganisms," Peter Kramer and Paola Bressan of the University of Padua describe a typical human body as a teeming mass of what they call "selfish entities." Picture a tree warped by fungus, wrapped with vines, dotted at the base with mushrooms and flowers, and marked, midway up, by what the tree thought the whole time was just a knot but turns out to be a parasitic twin. This is the human superorganism—not the tree, not the tangled mess of things doing battle with it, but the whole chunk of forest—and Kramer and Bressan would like to place it at the very center of the way we think about human behavior. They are psychologists, and their paper is a call to arms to their fellow shrinks, exhorting them to take seriously as a possible cause of an enormous buffet of behavioral phenomena—from quotidian quirks, to maddeningly opaque disorders like autism, to schizophrenia—the sheer volume and weird diversity of completely crazy alien shit going on in just about all of our bodies, just about all the time.

At least one part of this superorganism theory is not all that unfamiliar, especially to anyone who remembers recent articles by Michael Pollan and others about what is often called "the brain in your gut." That part: that our stomachs are, actually, zoos. In fact, they're not really *our* stomachs. Principally, they belong to the hundred trillion bacteria enticed by evolution into your chutes-and-ladders intestinal tract, then enlisted to eat your food for you. The weirder thing is that evolution also put hundreds of millions of neurons there, which means there's a lot of trouble to be caused by those 160 or more species of bacteria (yes, full species). And the behavioral effects are pretty startling. Take a mouse, evacuate his intestines, and repopulate them with the microbes of another mouse, and he'll act like the other mouse—adventurous mice become timid. In humans, what is delicately called "gut flora" affects not just obesity but also anxiety, and some think it plays a role in disorders as far-ranging as MS and Parkinson's. What role exactly? Who knows? Though there have been some attempts to treat autism with yogurt.

Okay, so, the gut is weird. But what if you lived in the gut? What if you *were* the gut? Kramer and Bressan want us to stop looking at our stomachs like we're hosts to some messy guests, or homeowners too disgusted by a particular closet to ever go poking around in it, because, they write, the human superorganism isn't something to observe from the privileged perch of the self. Instead, they suggest, it envelops the self—the envi-

ronment in which and against which genes give rise to who you are, an internal environment populated nevertheless by an entire orchestra of aliens, some of them fiddling away in the brain, and each with its own evolutionary interests at stake.

What aliens do they mean? They point also to viruses and parasitic diseases—both the ones that have already colonized our DNA (depending on how you count, as much as 45 percent of it) and the new ones we could catch, like *Toxoplasma gondii*, just for instance, which is three times as likely to be found in schizophrenics. And then there's what Kramer and Bressan call "foreign human cells"—a sort of catchall for whenever parts of one person end up in another. Which happens a lot! There's the way identical twins invariably share cells like Matchbox cars at the early stages of development; the way, they theorize, even fraternal twins arise from the same bundle of cells; the way a mother's immune system can attack and partially colonize a fetus she is carrying; the way a baby can send cells back in the other direction, including stem cells, which can grow into just about anything; and the way in which that mother-child dynamic may direct the in-house genetic engineering called gene imprinting. And it also includes, yes, Lydia Fairchild's vanishing twin, and the ones that many of us have been apparently hosting, unwittingly, our whole lives. All of which, Kramer and Bressan say, may just help explain why your son is gay. To take one of their more speculative claims.

As many as one in eight single-baby newborns, and possibly more, began life as one of two, later absorbing the other baby-to-be before anyone really noticed (including the baby, who at that point typically wouldn't have produced so much as a single limb).

One in eight adults who think they were born alone are carrying around, like a change purse, some residue of a sibling they never knew existed.

Which means that one in eight adults who think they were born alone are carrying around, like a change purse, some residue of a sibling they never knew existed; in some cases, that change purse could be, inside a woman, say, a male kidney. Foreign cells can come from children too; an autopsy study of 46 mothers showed male cells in 13 of their kidneys, ten of their livers, and four of their hearts, thanks to stem cells' having passed through the placenta, taken root where needed, and sprouted, sometimes into whole patches of tissue. In another study, this one of 59 women, 63 percent harbored male cells in their brains.

And then there are the more extreme cases, like fetus-in-fetu, a kind of twin growth almost too grotesquely surreal to mention. Almost. Possibly the gnarliest example is the case of Sanju Bhagat, an Indian man who carried his twin inside him for 36 years, until a 1999 surgery designed to relieve swelling in his stomach so massive it made him look pregnant. "To my surprise and horror, I could shake hands with somebody inside," a presiding doctor told reporters of the procedure. "First, one limb came out, then another limb came out. Then some part of genitalia, then some part of hair, some limbs, jaws, limbs, hair." As everyone noticed, the fingernails were quite long.

This is not, by the way, the speculative part of the paper; it's the real-deal part. In fact, what Kramer and Bressan have written is technically called a review, which means mostly it summarizes and analyzes existing research, enclosing in a single phenomenological circle a wide range of what had been seen as divergent subjects, grouping some pretty routine stuff with genetic anomalies that used to land you in a freak show. And then asks us to contemplate, and their colleagues to study more closely, what it all means for behavior and psychology and identity that a part of your brain really belongs to your daughter or your unborn twin—or, for that matter, a virus that's hijacked the control panels of at least some patch of cells. There are those who will wonder just how rigorous that speculation is, and, perhaps for them, the authors have preemptively chosen to open their paper with a quotation from *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (the Borg cycle, of course). But in fairness they probably could've also used H. G. Wells, Dostoyevsky, Freud, or any of the Romantic poets. "We argue that we do not have a unitary 'self,'" Kramer and Bressan write. "We argue that an incessant struggle among a very large number of 'selves'—some human, some not—determines who we are." Is it insane to say, at least as a metaphor for mosaic identity, that sounds sort of reasonable? ■



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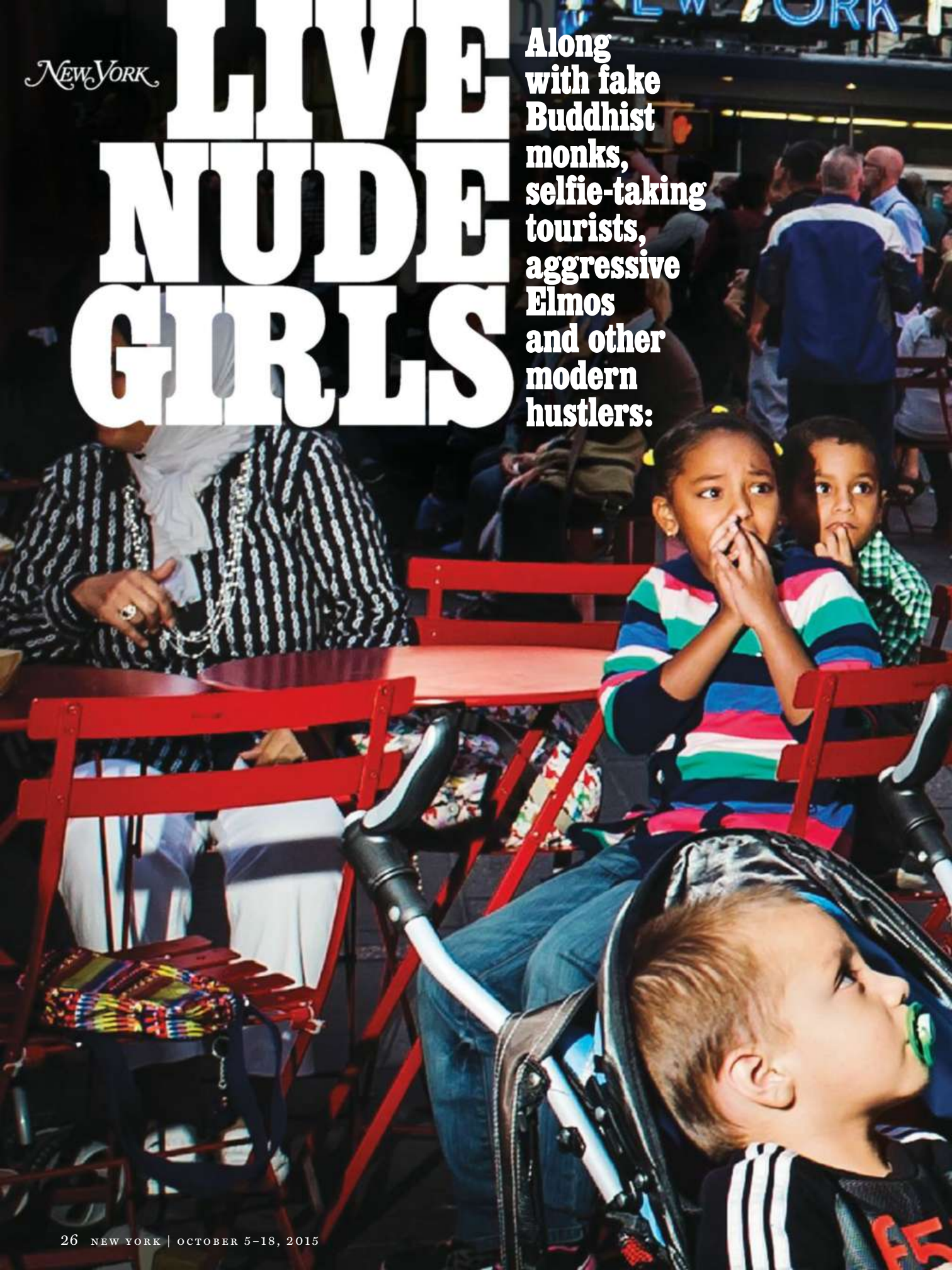
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TIMES SQUARE

in the de Blasio era.

By **ADAM STERNBERGH**

Photograph by Dina Litovsky

IN 1981, in an incident that attracted international attention and spurred a citywide existential crisis, a 26-year-old man from Connecticut was set upon, stripped naked, and chased by a jeering, bottle-throwing crowd in Times Square at night—"shadowy figures, drug peddlers, con artists, vagrants," as the *Times* would later describe the area's inhabitants—into a subway station, then onto the tracks, where he died. In 2015, I'm watching the modern-day equivalent of that scenario play out, the only differences being that it's the middle

of the afternoon, no one's throwing bottles, the victim is not really in mortal danger, and the crowd she's being set upon by consists of Iron Man, two Minnie Mice, Elsa from *Frozen*, and Elmo.

I've just arrived in Times Square to investigate the seemingly lawless chaos that has, of late, attracted international attention and spurred a citywide—or at least tabloidwide—existential crisis. I've been here for exactly one minute. The woman, who made the obvious tactical error of entering Times Square with her phone visibly in hand, now finds herself corralled by costumed cartoon characters looking for tips in exchange for a photo. They encircle her with such familiarity that I honestly wonder for a moment if she's yet another Minnie, newly arrived and not yet costumed for her shift.

Throughout New York's history, Times Square has served as a bellwether of the city's current mood—as well as the perceptions of the city, both for those who live here and those who don't. Once, Times Square was a high temple of glamour, the glowing heart of a go-go metropolis. Then it, like the city around it, slid into seedy decline. When much of New York was sleazy and dangerous, nowhere seemed sleazier or more dangerous than 42nd Street. And when Times Square came to feel too touristy, it mirrored a parallel worry that New York itself was losing some of its intrinsic grit. Times Square exists less as a crossroads than as a repository for our collective hopes and fears for the city. Now it's entering a new phase—perhaps the strangest, most inscrutable one yet.

The most commonly voiced description of the New Times Square—the one midwifed into existence in the '90s by Rudy Giuliani and Michael Eisner; the one that now welcomes more than 39 million tourists a year, roughly equivalent to the population of Poland; the one we associate more with Mickey Mouse than Ratso Rizzo and Carson Daly than Damon Runyon—is "Disneyfied." This is almost never meant as a compliment. Yet even the area's most cynical critic could never have envisioned a day when the famously sanitized, corporatized, Disneyfied Times Square would become infamous for a plague of vaguely mangy Disney characters shaking down tourists for money.

And that's not even to mention the puritan furor over the naked ladies with the painted bosoms.

"I gotta go, I gotta go, guys," says the woman good-naturedly, still smiling, as she's pincered between two Minnies. The mute characters paw at her in a kind of creepily adorable pantomime. Iron Man offers to take her picture, as if this were a moment she'd want to cherish. She starts to squirm. "I gotta go," she says more forcefully, then wriggles free from the scrum. As she hurries north, her eyes turn not to the world-famous gauntlet of towering digital screens overhead but to the five-inch screen clutched in her hand. This is when I realize that this woman must be a native New Yorker. Because as she beetles across the plaza toward her destination, she seems determined to avoid, or at least ignore, whatever it is that Times Square has become.

WHAT IS YOUR DREAM for Times Square? And what is your nightmare of Times Square?

Back in the spring, as a thought experiment, the Times Square Alliance, a non-profit organization funded largely by local businesses, put those two questions to its board members and stakeholders, collected their answers, and printed them on fortunes to be inserted in fortune cookies as part of a giveaway.

"Go ahead, take some," Tim Tompkins, the president of the TSA, told me recently. "We have an excessive supply." For the record, my "dream" cookie read, "A true civic center and real public space," while my "nightmare" cookie read, "Overrun by costumed characters, solicitors & big sign hawkers"—which, come to think of it, are pretty close to my own dreams and nightmares for Times Square. Though, also for the record, had I been asked those questions directly, I would have answered, "My dream: never to be in Times Square" and "My nightmare: to be in Times Square."

The current jam-packed, galleria-fied iteration of Times Square has always reminded me of a place in Alberta, Canada, called Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump: a high cliff where aboriginal hunters once cunningly maneuvered huge herds of bison into a narrow pathway before forcing them off a cliff edge to their death. The famous Times Square "bow tie"—the area between 42nd Street and 47th Street where Broadway and Seventh Avenue intersect—similarly functions as a de facto tourist corral; a canyon, walled in by giant, garish video billboards, into which visitors to the city are hustled and contained. And this Head-Smashed-In version of Times Square, for what it is, has been undeniably successful: It takes up only 0.1 percent of New York's landmass but represents 11 percent of the city's economic activity, generating \$110 billion annually, which is larger than the amount generated in an entire city like Cincinnati. To a broader degree, Times Square is the geographical and symbolic center of New York's vaunted tourism boom, which finds the city the most popular destination in the United States for international travelers. The Faustian bargain, of course, has always seemed to be: Yes, you can save the center of your city from civic ruin with an infusion of bright lights and corporate money, but in return, you have to cede that space to people who don't actually live here.

When the Times Square Alliance commissioned a survey in 2012 and asked respondents for the word that best describes the area, the top three negative answers given by New Yorkers were "touristy," "crowded," and "noisy." (The top three negative words among respondents nationwide: "crowded," "touristy," and "commercialized"—even the tourists like to complain about the tourists.) These

*A crowd gathers
to watch a 1932
solar eclipse in
Times Square.*



are the exact sentiments that the Times Square Alliance is hoping to change. Its recent mandate, in part, is to give Times Square back to New Yorkers—or, at least, to reimagine Times Square as something New Yorkers might embrace. “It’s the geographical center of the city and a huge transportation hub,” says Sherry Dobbin, who was hired by the TSA in 2012 as its director of public art. “So the idea is: How do we also make it a cultural hub?” Sure, there’s Broadway, but there’s also no reason why you can’t stage cultural happenings in Times Square that New Yorkers would actively seek out. To that end, Dobbins has instituted events like the Midnight Moment, when most of the billboards are given over for three minutes to a visiting artist. In a larger sense, the mandate is about reinventing Times Square in people’s imaginations as a place to gather in and enjoy, rather than to avoid or endure. “We want to have a larger conversation,” Tompkins says. “What’s the vision for this public space? What can Times Square be?”

The recent conversation about Times Square, of course, has not been quite so lofty. Instead, it’s been focused on those swarms of costumed characters that clog the pedestrian plaza. Or, more sensationally, the so-called *desnudas*: women who pose for photos topless, wearing star-spangled body paint. They became a particular tabloid fixation this summer: “Too Much to Bare,” “Flesh Pit Pimps,” and “City’s in a Booby Trap” are just a few highlights from what proved to be a fruitful season for headline writers. Not to mention the guys who aggressively press you to purchase their dubious rap CDs and the fake Buddhist monks who wear orange robes and harass people for donations. In a recent TSA report outlining a plan to limit commercial activity to designated zones, one such activity is listed as simply “Fake Buddhist monks,” which is now apparently an official species in the Times Square ecosystem.

In response to the uproar, Police Commissioner William Bratton declared the city should “dig the whole damn thing up”—meaning rip up the newly installed pedestrian plazas and restore Broadway as a thoroughfare for cars. (Because, as all New Yorkers remember, Times Square before the pedestrian plazas was a pastoral oasis of urban civility.) Mayor de Blasio called this apparent epidemic in Times Square “unacceptable” and announced that he’d consider Bratton’s proposal, a statement that was met with almost universal horror. (“That’s not a solution. It’s a surrender,” Tompkins said at the time.) Meanwhile, Governor Cuomo, never one to let his finger be outwagged, warned of a return to the “bad old Times Square.” One thing seemed clear: Times Square, once a famously intractable civic conundrum that, 20 years ago, finally seemed to be solved, is suddenly in the midst of unsolving itself.

The Giuliani Times Square that lives on in mythology is a squeaky-clean, family-friendly, Disneyfied rejuvenation; the Bloomberg Times Square is a stubbornly progressive laboratory of urbanism, street closures, and lawn chairs. De Blasio’s Times Square is, well, a lot like de Blasio’s New York so far: a place ripe with old promise and new challenges, governed by an apparent hodgepodge of reactive measures and plagued by the perception, unfairly or not, that it’s on the verge of spiraling out of control. Which brings us back to those two basic questions: What is your dream and your nightmare of Times Square? Think carefully, because they’re connected to a third, related question: What exactly do you want New York to be?

JESSE AND YASMIN are an attractive young couple who look way too cool to be in Times Square, and, as it turns out, they are. They’re from Queens, and they’re currently entertaining Jesse’s parents, Dan and Bonnie, who are visiting from San Francisco. The four of them are standing in the pedestrian plaza at 44th and Broadway, looking a little bewildered. There’s five of them, actually, including Jesse and Yasmin’s 9-week-old son, Ajax, who’s currently asleep in his stroller, blissfully immune to the cacophony. Dan, who has a large camera hanging around his neck, is studiously scanning the

plaza. “I was hoping to get a picture of the baby with the naked lady,” he explains. “We thought that would be a good souvenir.”

They’re a little too early for the *desnudas*—it’s only 2 P.M.—but by five, the plaza is teeming with picturesque nudity. If your knowledge of the *desnudas* is through glancing at the *Post* or *Daily News*, you might expect that Times Square currently feels like a cross between a Dutch red-light district, a Wild West town, and a Caligulan orgy. “An out-of-control influx of near-naked women jockeying for tips has turned Times Square into the XXX-Roads of the World—shocking children and incensing legions of tourists and New Yorkers alike” is how one *Daily News* story in August described it. It was hard to discern any genuine outrage in these stories, but they provided a perfect summertime distraction for scandal-hungry readers who love to hate Times Square, as well as feeding one of two compelling metanarratives, depending on your view: de Blasio’s continued fumbling or the tabloids’ incessant war on de Blasio.

In reality, while there have been a few notable incidents—a fight between an unstable female passerby and one of the performers; the arrest of another performer for alleged prostitution and drug possession—the atmosphere around the women seems friendly, even festive. They circulate around the plaza, smiling with the pleasantly distracted air of flight attendants, their outfits no more titillating than those of Vegas showgirls. (In winter, they add fur caps and warm leggings but keep the bare-chested patriotism visible, each looking like a one-woman American-Soviet summit.) They flirt. They tickle passing men with long red feathers. These women, nearly all of them Latina, from Colombia or Peru or, in a few cases, the Bronx, don’t love the slang term *desnudas*, preferring “painted performer.” Some wear bikini tops or pasties, and as for the ones who



go topless—as women are legally entitled to do in New York—their nudity is so obscured by body paint that you typically have to glance twice to confirm it. In fact, *Sports Illustrated* features the same brand of body-painted licentiousness nearly every year in its fairly chaste swimsuit issue.

Amanda Roman, who's 23 and from the Bronx, has been out in Times Square, topless, since last September. She comes with Chris Olivieri, who's 25 and has been working with women in Times Square—holding their belongings, watching their backs, sharing their tips—for the past four years. “My uncle was the one that came up with the idea,” he says. “We used to go to parties in the Domino Sugar Factory and they'd have body-painted girls handing out drinks and taking pictures with people. It was exciting. So we were like, ‘We could try this. The Naked Cowboy's out there.’ So we tried it one day, and it was a big success.” I ask him why they chose Times Square, and he says plainly, “It's the crossroads of the world.” Over four years, he's never had a problem. But this summer, everything changed. Olivieri is disappointed in de Blasio's scolding—“I voted for him,” he says—but he blames the discord on newcomers: women, many of them visiting New York from outside the country, who saw what he and his women were doing and copied it. “Instead of knowing the concept, they carried themselves a different way,” he says.

As for Amanda, she heard about the job from Chris's uncle; you can average about \$300 a day, but at first she was apprehensive. “It's something you have to experience for yourself,” she says. “It can sound kind of scary. But it's actually fun. I like it best when people are looking at the picture and smiling and laughing with their family about it.” She's found a way to cope with the long hours working topless at the crossroads of the world: “I meditate. I do a standing meditation.”

Yogis celebrating the summer solstice this year.



Amanda and Chris met in Times Square, and now they're dating—a modern Times Square love story. Frankly, they seem like obvious candidates for a reality show. “I would love that!” Amanda says.

It's funny watching the *desnudas* and the costumed characters cluster together in the plaza, and not just for the obvious comic juxtaposition of topless women alongside Minions. These twin phenomena almost cartoonishly personify two very different incarnations of Times Square—they're like the ghosts of Times Square Past and Times Square Present, risen to hustle side by side. The *desnudas*, with their feathered fans and demure come-ons, recall less the sleazy, triple-X-porn days of Times Square than an earlier era of vaudeville theaters and bawdy burlesque—an era when, as James Traub writes in *The Devil's Playground*, his definitive history of Times Square, “the burlesque theater spilled out into the street in the form of barkers and steerers who tried to whip the customers inside; giant posters of half-naked girls blared from under the marquees.” This was in 1932.

The cartoon characters, of course, seem more like weird mutant offspring of the modern, Disneyfied Times Square; as a visual metaphor for cheery commercialism run amok, they could not be more poignant, like a George Saunders story come to life. They hover with eerily implacable smiles, much like the official versions you'd encounter at Disney World. Yet, as a friend, a lifelong New Yorker, remarks: “They always take the mask off when they ask you for tips—to remind you that there's a human inside.”

Francisco Lopez, 40, is a Mickey. He's originally from Mexico, but he's lived in the U.S. for 25 years, in California, then New York, now New Jersey. He lists many of the same factors most of the characters will give you if you ask them about the work: It's fun. He likes making children smile. The costume is very hot. “Then the ladies came, and problems started,” he says. He's not offended by the topless women. They just tend to siphon his tips. He's lucky to get one or two dollars from a family, whereas the women, he claims, can get \$20 per photo. “One time, a man said to me, ‘I have no money!’” Lopez says. “I say, ‘Fine, no problem, I take the picture with your kids.’ Then I see that same man take a picture with a woman and give her \$20! Then she asked for \$20 more. He gave her \$40!”

The costumed characters tend to work in concert; when someone stops to pose for a picture with one of them, the other characters quickly cluster, so your snapshot with Smurfette turns into a group shot with seven or eight characters, all of whom expect to be tipped. Some people pay up happily. Some pay up less than happily. Some just walk away. “I'm Mickey Mouse, and Mickey Mouse is America,” says Lopez. “So that's what I say when I ask for tips.” He points to himself and his iconic costume, then says in his heavy accent: “I say ‘America!’”

AT THE END of the 19th century, before there was a Times Square, the muddy intersection at Broadway and 42nd Street was known as Longacre Square, a locus of literal horse-trading. A few Broadway theaters had already risen along the stretch north of 42nd Street, including the elder Oscar Hammerstein's fabled Olympia Theatre. The area was a burgeoning entertainment district, but it did not yet have an identity. All of that changed on April 8, 1904, when it was rechristened Times Square by mayoral decree, on the occasion of the arrival on 42nd Street of a building that would house the New York *Times*. Times Square enjoyed a few decades of glamour as part of “The Great White Way,” then was felled by a string of events: Prohibition (which replaced fancy dining establishments with mob-run speak-easies), the rise of cinema (which converted grand old theaters to populist movie halls), and the Depression (which suffocated upscale entertainment and ushered in the age of burlesque).

Times Square has always served as a bellwether of the city's current mood—as well as the perceptions of the city, both for those who live here and those who don't.

"Times Square has been a place of illusion and fantasy, where the view backward conveniently benchmarked the present and not infrequently appeared better," writes scholar Lynne Sagalyn in *Times Square Roulette*. She identifies several types of Times Square nostalgist, including "skeptics," who view all change with suspicion; "retrogrades," who long for the seedier past because they feel that it's intrinsically authentic; "wistfuls," who recognize that change is inevitable, even beneficial; and "resilients," whose "optimism comes from faith in the city's unpredictable ways." Where you fall on that spectrum will largely determine how you view any sort of change in Times Square, and which previous era you find yourself most in love with. "For me, that moment is the '30s, '40s, and '50s—what I think of as A.J. Liebling New York," says Traub, in reference to the famed *New Yorker* writer who chronicled the area's more colorful denizens. "That's when Times Square was no longer glamorous but it wasn't yet dangerous. It was seedy—in a wonderful kind of way."

By the 1950s, the raffish, romantic underworld was subsumed by a more malevolent air. Its proximity to Penn Station, plus the opening of the Port Authority Bus Terminal in 1950, ensured a stream of faceless thrill-seekers that Times Square and 42nd Street were all too eager to accommodate. In 1960, a *Times* story headlined "Life on W. 42d St. a Study in Decay" announced that the area had become "an enigma to New Yorkers concerned with the deterioration of the midway of Manhattan." By the '70s, the area's most notorious chronicler was Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver*; muttering about how "all the animals come out at night—whores, skunk pussies, buggers, queens, fairies, dopers, junkies, sick, venal. Someday a real rain'll come and wash all this scum off the streets."

The conundrum of what to do with Times Square plagued six consecutive mayoral administrations, starting in the 1960s. Ideas to save the area were forwarded and rejected in turn, including one fanciful rejuvenation called "The City at 42nd Street" in 1978, with a proposal that included tearing down most of the existing buildings and replacing them with two city blocks' worth of theme park, enclosed under glass and circled by a monorail. Mayor Ed Koch squelched the idea, in part because, as he said, "New York cannot and should not compete with Disneyland ... People do not come to midtown Manhattan to take a ride on some machine." New Yorkers, he declared, want "seltzer instead of orange juice," in reference to Disney's Florida locale. Then, in July 1995, this long-standing problem was finally addressed. Mayor Giuliani signed a deal that would close the remaining porn establishments on 42nd Street and cement a new partnership with Disney, which had agreed to revitalize one of the area's derelict live theaters. A new, family-friendly Times Square was born in a great, cleansing flood of orange juice.

TWENTY YEARS LATER, it's been easy for New Yorkers to assume that Times Square is no longer an issue, largely because many people think of it as no longer part of New York. It's more like Checkpoint Charlie: a cordoned-off chunk of enemy territory in the middle of the city. "A college roommate of mine once said that Middle America thinks that Times Square is all about New York, and New Yorkers think it's all about Middle America," Tompkins told me.

Around 2008, however, this started to change. First, the new TKTS booth opened, with its inviting tier of red steps offering one of the more spectacular views of the city. Then, in 2009, Mayor Bloomberg installed the first of the proposed pedestrian plazas on Broad-

way, a move that was applauded by progressive urbanists and opened the possibility that Times Square could once again become a kind of civic stage; a place where people, including New Yorkers, might gather to see wondrous things. From Hubert's Flea Circus in the '20s to its sleaziest '70s porn-palace days—when shops like Peepland advertised films with straightforward descriptions like "Man fucks a hen"—the enticement of Times Square has always been the same: Come see something you can't see anywhere else. The story of Times Square's recent decline—or, at least, the rise of a set of circumstances that's led to this summer's dig-the-damn-thing-up panic—is connected to a loss of that allure, which has been replaced by a citywide sense of neglect. New Yorkers who don't have to be there for work more or less have turned their backs on the area. And by most accounts, Times Square has never been a priority for Mayor de Blasio, who is driven by the determination that Bloomberg, his predecessor, focused too squarely on Manhattan's amenities (true), and a less valiant notion that the plazas are part of Bloomberg's legacy and thus not worth championing (questionable).

The tourists, meanwhile—all 39 million of them—are having no trouble figuring out what Times Square is for. To them, it still exists as a stage, but one on which they are the main attraction. The TKTS booth, as *New York* critic Justin Davidson has written, puts the whole sparkling city on display yet also "gratifies the narcissistic sense that each of us is starring in a real-time biopic." Once, what was offered in Times Square was New York in all its glamour or all its vice; now what you're watching onstage is yourself, with New York as the backdrop. "You haven't been to New York until you've been to Times Square!" declares Cat W, who visited last year from Austria, to her fellow travelers on the website TripAdvisor. "Standing here feels like you are starring in a blockbuster movie, starring YOU!"

Which is why it's impossible to talk about the Elmos, or the *desnudas*, or Times Square, without talking about all the cameras—specifically, the fact that nearly every single person is now armed with a personal camera and is looking for something interesting to photograph. In 2014, Times Square was the most-Instagrammed site in New York City and the third-most-Instagrammed place on Earth. A major selling point for the enormous billboards, in fact, is that they deliver "multiple impressions," because they're photographed so frequently and those photos are shared on social media. One popular billboard allows you to gather below as part of a crowd, watch yourself onscreen, pose for a picture, then see that photo on the billboard, so you can snap a photo of that photo.

And so the costumed characters and *desnudas* are a distinctly modern addition to the same storied lineage of the three-card-monte hustlers and con artists in the Times Square of yore. The one thing that Amanda Roman and Elmo inarguably have in common is that (a) they're both interesting to look at and (b) they both exist primarily for you to take a picture of. The new Times Square hustle isn't offering you sex or the promise of riches—it's offering you something cool or funny that you can Instagram.

If nothing else, these street performers have served to finally win back the city's attention—of both the residents and the current administration. Since the backlash to his comments, Commissioner Bratton has claimed that his outburst—"dig the whole damn thing up"—was a calculated effort to "smoke people out" on their positions regarding the plaza. The mayor, in turn, announced the formation of a task force, headed by Bratton and Carl Weisbrod, chairman of

the City Planning Commission, to determine a course of action; the task force recommended creating specific zones with new rules that will regulate *desnudas*, Elmos, and, yes, fake Buddhist monks. “Many of the challenges today are a product of the success of Times Square,” Weisbrod told me. The task force estimates, though, that it may take another year to determine the regulations.

In the meantime, the post-Giuliani, post-Bloomberg, de Blasio Times Square, with its TKTS stairs and partially completed pedestrian plazas, has been languishing as a half-built stage. In an office high above the square, the TSA has been brainstorming one bunch of possibilities: They have a wall covered with yellow stickies of ideas, including pop-up bookstores, Broadway karaoke, and virtual-reality tours. Down below, a different show has bubbled up, hoping to draw your camera lens and wrest a few bucks from your wallet. If history has taught us anything, it’s that the Times Square stage is going to be filled by something, one way or the other. Right now, the city—both the administration and the residents who long ago wrote the area off—just needs to step up and reclaim it.

SOMETHING IS HAPPENING in Times Square. Someone’s painting a naked black man in white paint and a naked white woman in black paint. Nearby, two more naked people are holding a frame around themselves; they’re painted, rather expertly, to look like *The Persistence of Memory*, by Salvador Dalí. They’re part of a demonstration called #ArtTranscends, organized by the artist Dani Fonseca, who’s worked at Fashion Week and with Lady Gaga. She organized a few body-paint-artist friends to protest the negative press that body painting has gotten thanks to the *desnudas*. One of the artists, Yvonne MacInnis, is responsible for the Dalí painting. “We thought that people who’ve come to Times Square should see something really cool,” she says. I ask about her connection to the naked people being painted a few feet away, and she says, “Oh, that’s not us. That’s something else.”

“I inadvertently started the *desnudas* thing!” announces Andy Golub, the other, unrelated body-paint artist. Golub says he painted two naked models in Times Square back in 2011, got arrested, fought the charges, and won, on grounds that public nudity is legal as part of artistic display. As he sees it, this was the inspiration for Chris Olivieri and all the feathered women who followed. “But I’ve come back to clarify that it’s not just boobs but penises and vaginas that are allowed as well, in the name of art,” Golub says.

I’m going to stop and say something heretical: Times Square is kind of fun. Especially when you’re not rushing through it but actually have some time to linger. I don’t mean in the Olive Garden or the Hard Rock Cafe; I mean in the streets, in the plaza, in the public square. In the past few weeks, I spent more time loitering in Times Square than in all my previous years in New York—including three years spent working on its periphery—and I assure you, there’s always something happening in Times Square. Sometimes it’s something annoying. Often it is something weird. Occasionally it’s something delightful. It might be guerrilla surrealist body art, or a Japanese singer who brings out an amp for a few ballads before

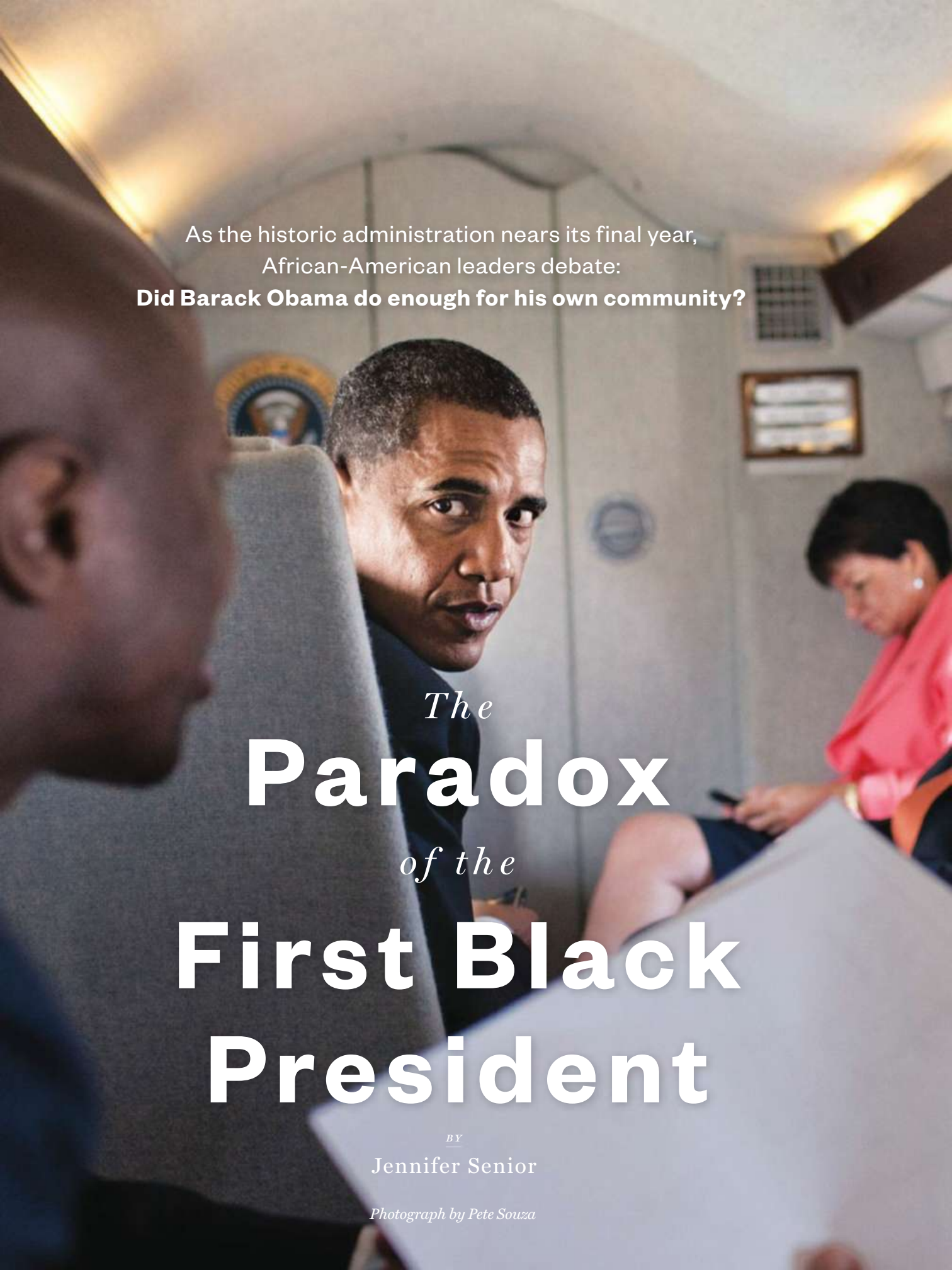


An installation by the artist Spencer Tunick in 1997.

disappearing, or two guys shooting a video for Clint Black, featuring Times Square denizens holding signs like Bob Dylan in “Subterranean Homesick Blues.” The best part about watching the *desnudas* at work is seeing tourists stroll past, glance over, then do a double-take: *Wait, am I seeing what I think I’m seeing?* They’re experiencing something legitimately unexpected and memorable—which is to say, perhaps the most authentically New York-ian thing they may encounter during their entire visit here.

A few more expertly painted naked models arrive to join the Dalí painting: a steampunk couple, a kind of demonic mermaid, and a futuristic pair painted blue and gold with disco-ball helmets. Watching them, it occurs to me that, from Andy Golub to the *desnudas* to the disco-helmeted blue-and-gold protesters, a mini-epic of New York is being enacted, right here in Times Square, sketched out in body paint. A brazen act of public protest has somehow inspired some opportunistic capitalist hustling, which in turn has spurred this outpouring of genuine artistic showmanship. It’s like a tiny Times Square fable—a reminder that, like a patch of grass breaking through concrete, the spirit of New York can pop up anywhere.

Spider-Man runs over to take a photo of two naked people painted as *Persistence of Memory*; this is something even he hasn’t seen before. As a bigger crowd gathers, I realize that, just a few blocks away, there’s a whole bunch of other people who are missing this but probably gawking in wonder at something equally remarkable. I’m reminded of what Shannon, a genial liaison who watches the action from his perch in a Times Square info booth, told me about a young lady he spotted one day. “She was walking by, just looking up and smiling,” he says, “and I was like, ‘What are you smiling about?’ And she looked around at Times Square and was like: ‘This. Everything.’” ■

A photograph of Barack Obama in a meeting room, looking over his shoulder at someone off-camera. He is wearing a dark suit. In the foreground, the back of a person's head is visible on the left. In the background, a woman in a pink top is seated and looking down. The room has a curved ceiling and a framed picture on the wall.

As the historic administration nears its final year,
African-American leaders debate:
Did Barack Obama do enough for his own community?

The
Paradox
of the
**First Black
President**

BY

Jennifer Senior

Photograph by Pete Souza



HERE IS A PHOTO BY Pete Souza, the White House's canny and peripatetic photographer, that surfaces from time to time online. The setting is Marine One, and it features a modest cast of five. Valerie Jarrett, dressed in a suit of blazing pink, is staring at her cell phone. Barack Obama, twisted around in his seat, is listening to a conversation between his then-body guy, Reggie Love, and Patrick Gaspard, one of his then-top advisers. Obama's former deputy press secretary, Bill Burton, is looking on too, with just the mildest hint of a grin on his face.

In many ways, it's a banal shot—just another photo for the White House Instagram feed, showing the president and his aides busily attending to matters of state. Stare at it a second longer, though, and a subtle distinction comes into focus: Everyone onboard is black. “We joked that it was *Soul Plane*,” says Burton. “And we’ve often joked about it since—that it was the first time in history only black people were on that helicopter.”

Souza snapped that shot on August 9, 2010, but it didn’t make any prominent appearances in the mainstream press until mid-2012, when it appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*. The following summer, July 2013, the president had a group of civil-rights leaders come visit him in the Roosevelt Room of the White House, and the optics, as they like to say in politics, were similar: An all-star cast of minorities (African-American and Latino this time) gathered in a historic place to which the barriers to entry were once insuperably high.

But this was not a meeting the participants laughed about afterward. When Obama opened up the floor, everyone spoke about what they’d witnessed in the 2012 election: how states that limited

voter-registration drives and early-voting initiatives had left many African-Americans off the rolls; how strict new laws concerning IDs had prevented many minorities from voting and created hours-long lines at the polls. The answer was clear: legislation to restore the Voting Rights Act. The Supreme Court had just overturned a key provision of the landmark civil-rights legislation the month before.

But Obama's response was equally clear: Nothing could be done. Not in this political climate, not under these circumstances. Congress would never allow it.

The group was stunned. As they'd stumped for Obama, one of the many talking points they'd used to turn out the black vote was the threat of disenfranchisement, the possibility that the Voting Rights Act was in jeopardy. Yet here was Obama telling them that a bill addressing this vital issue didn't stand a chance.

These proximal events—the publication of a historic photo in a major news outlet, a demoralizing discussion about the prospects of amending our voting laws—may seem unrelated. But to many who've watched this White House for the last six and three-quarter years, particularly with an eye toward race, the two events are finely intertwined. They would more likely say: One cannot have that photo without a massive reaction to that photo. In a country whose basic genetic blueprint includes the same crooked mutations that made slavery and Jim Crow possible, it is not possible to have a black president surrounded by black aides on Marine One without paying a price. And the price that Obama has had to pay—and, more important, that African-Americans have had to pay—is one of caution, moderation, and at times compromised policies: The first black president could do only so much, and say only so much, on behalf of other African-Americans. That is the bitter-sweet irony of the first black presidency.

But now, as Obama's presidency draws to a close, African-American intellectuals and civil-rights leaders have grown increasingly vocal in their discontents. They frame them, for the most part, with love and respect. But current events have broken their hearts and stretched their patience. A proliferation of videos documenting the murders of unarmed black men and women—by the very people charged with their safety—has given rise to a whole movement defined by three words and a hashtag: #BlackLivesMatter.

"That's one of the fundamental paradoxes of Obama's presidency—that we have the Black Lives Matter movement under a black president," says Fredrick Harris, a political scientist at

“I too would have liked to see the Obama years do more. But Barack Obama never gave us a bill that hurt us.”



Al Sharpton,
MINISTER AND ACTIVIST

Columbia University. “Your man is in office, and you have this whole movement around criminal-justice reform asserting black people's humanity?”

Obama is hardly uncomprehending of these concerns. One can hear it in his rhetoric on race these days, which has become much more lyrical, personal, explicit. “Amazing Grace,” he sang in Charleston. “Racism, we are not cured of,” he told Marc Maron, “and it's not just a matter of it not being polite to say ‘n-----’ in public,” using the full word. This summer, Obama visited a prison, the first president to do so, and commuted the sentences of 46 nonviolent drug offenders. Last year, he started the My Brother's Keeper initiative, which zeros in on programs within federal agencies that can help young men of color. He is now trying, with the improbable cooperation of congressional Republicans, to pass a bill on criminal-justice reform.

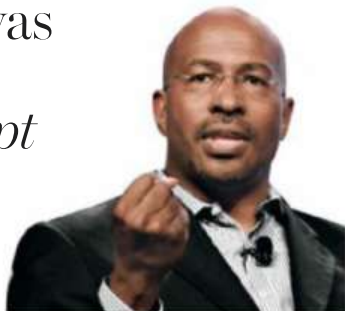
Still, the question many African-American leaders are now asking is what his efforts will amount to, and whether they're sufficient. At a panel about African-American millennials in August, the journalist Charlayne Hunter-Gault made note of Obama's recent emphasis on race matters and asked the group if it was “too little, too late.” Their responses, not surprisingly, were mixed. At the Aspen Ideas Festival this summer, Jarrett fielded a similar question from Walter Isaacson, the writer and head of the Aspen Institute. He noted that some Americans thought Obama publicly engaged with issues of race only “half-way.” Her reply was swift, pointed, and poignant. “I think you have to ask yourself: Why is that all on him?”

Just after November 5, 2008, there was, in this country, a brief spell of racial euphoria. The streets on Election Eve were filled with jubilant strangers hugging and kissing one another. The word *postracial* got tossed around a lot (by whites, it must be said, far more than blacks). A Gallup poll released two days after Obama's victory declared that two-thirds of Americans said “a solution to relations between blacks and whites will eventually be worked out,” the highest percentage Gallup has measured on this question.

Going into the Oval Office, Obama had given one of the most extraordinary speeches about race this country had ever heard from a politician. Granted, he'd had no choice: His former pastor, the Reverend Jeremiah Wright, had preached a sermon in 2003 that included the words “God damn America,” which were inconveniently caught on videotape. But Obama's response—a 37-minute speech in Philadelphia that patiently put these words in historical context—was risky, audacious, possibly even contraindicated. “There were many cowardly ways to handle that situ-

“I understood the tight-rope from the beginning. He's the president of all people. But sometimes it felt like he was president of everyone *except* black people.”

Van Jones,
OBAMA'S FORMER SPECIAL
ADVISER ON GREEN JOBS



ation,” says Van Jones, Obama’s former special adviser for green jobs, “but he chose the most courageous one.” The speech got 1.2 million hits within the first 24 hours of being posted on YouTube.

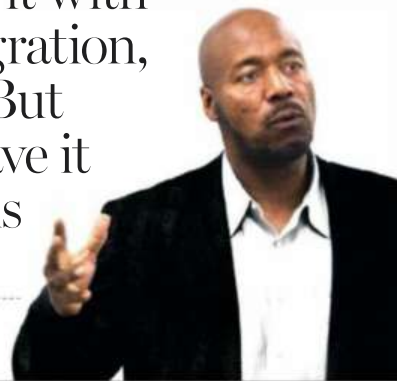
What one says as a candidate is one thing; what one says as president is another. Six months into Obama’s tenure, a reporter asked the president what he thought of the arrest of Harvard’s Henry Louis Gates Jr., one of the most famous African-American intellectuals in the United States, who had been taken into custody for trying to unstick the stubborn front door of his own home. Obama replied that although he didn’t have all the facts, he thought the Cambridge police had “acted stupidly.” Within minutes, the world seemed to come off its hinges, with Fox and its cousins—even some of its in-laws in the mainstream press—declaiming that Obama had insufficient respect for law enforcement. Obama dialed back his comments, proposing that Gates and the police officer meet at the White House over beers.

“There was the president of the United States,” says Jones, “escorted by the white vice-president, sitting at a little table with an arguably racist white beat cop from Boston, like some little kid in time-out in a kindergarten class.” The incident would subsequently become known as “the beer summit.” “I don’t think anyone has really tried to think through the harm that that whole incident inflicted on the country,” he continues. “The courageous president we had voted for disappeared.” Jones says that a number of White House staffers, particularly those of color, wished the president hadn’t done it. “I wish he had gone out and said, ‘I want to clarify what I said about the police behaving foolishly. What I meant was: They behaved *damn* foolishly. I’m going back to work.’”

It didn’t help that Obama’s brain trust—at least in the beginning—seemed to be made extremely uncomfortable by race matters. “Sometimes liberals think, *Because I’m fair-minded, I know how to handle race relations*,” says Marc Morial, the head of the National Urban League. “No. Handling race relations means knowing how to handle alligators and crocodiles. Apart from Valerie Jarrett, there weren’t a lot of African-American advisers in there who were experienced in dealing with race.” He thinks for a moment. “Or white advisers,” he adds. “There are lots of white advisers who have experience in dealing with race relations. But

“Obama has a famous swag. It’s a signal he sends with his walk that says, ‘I got this.’ He had it with trade, immigration, health care. But he doesn’t have it when he talks about race.”

Paul Butler, PROFESSOR,
GEORGETOWN LAW SCHOOL



I think the David Axelrod–Rahm Emanuel axis didn’t understand it.” Barbara Arnwine, the recently retired executive director of the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, says people would refer to Obama’s advisers as “the Great White Wall.” She adds: “During his first term, I thought Bill Clinton was more directly engaged with the black and civil-rights community on policy matters than Obama was—and a lot less defensive.”

The beer summit was the last the public heard from Obama about race for quite some time. Daniel Q. Gillion, a political scientist at the University of Pennsylvania, later analyzed the record of the president’s public comments and found he’d spoken less about race in his first two years than any Democratic president since JFK. “Whenever I gave an interview, I felt the pressure to say, ‘All Americans, all Americans,’” says Jones, who resigned from the White House in September 2009 after revelations about his previous political affiliations and beliefs, which were more radical than the White House would have liked. “There was this anxiety that we shouldn’t look too concerned about blacks. I understood the tightrope from the beginning. He’s the president of all people. But sometimes it felt like he was president of everyone *except* black people.”

One can argue that Obama’s hands were tied from the very beginning. This country is still a vexed mess when it comes to race. Even during the first campaign, Obama’s advisers were painfully aware of the electorate’s misgivings. They were hard to miss, if you were in the polling business. The Democratic pollster Stan Greenberg tells an illustrative tale: When his firm surveyed hundreds of likely voters in Macomb County, Michigan (fabled for its dense concentration of Reagan Democrats), “they were acutely conscious that Obama was African-American. What they said was, ‘Is he going to govern for everybody? Or is he going to govern for his people?’ That was the critical, pivotal question for them.” These crucial voters wanted to see Obama as a symbol of progress, of how far we’d come. *Yes, we can.* They didn’t want to see him as a symbol of disaffection, of how far we had to go. “I am sure the campaign was conscious of it,” says Greenberg, “and he had to deal with it if he was going to sustain their support—governing not for a particular group, but for everybody.”

These same reservations were evident—maybe even

“Too often, he uses these occasions not to push for greater accountability within law enforcement but to push a narrative that black people should behave more responsibly.”



Alicia Garza, CO-CREATOR
OF #BLACKLIVESMATTER

intensified—in the immediate aftermath of the election. That Gallup survey that trumpeted our optimism? It also found deep streaks of pessimism. Only 32 percent of McCain voters felt proud of Obama. More than half, 56 percent, felt “afraid.” By 2010, the tea party was ascendant, peddling racist imagery. “No one expected the pictures of him eating watermelon, the pictures making him look like a monkey, the Sambos,” says Arnwine. “The racism was so *base*.”

Obama’s election brought out not just the best of the country, in other words, but its worst. “Portions of white America have literally had a nervous breakdown over a black man being in the White House,” says Anthea Butler, a religious-studies professor at the University of Pennsylvania. “I mean, here people are, acting so surprised about Donald Trump’s popularity. Hello? He’s the one who asked Obama for a birth certificate!”

Writing in *The Atlantic* in 2012, Ta-Nehisi Coates tried to show, brick by brick, how the Republican rhetoric of the Obama years has been racialized in ways both subtle and explicit. He noted that Obamacare was framed as “reparations.” (Bill Clinton’s stab at universal health care, meanwhile, was generally framed as an excess of “big government.”) In January 2012, Newt Gingrich declared that “more people have been put on food stamps by Barack Obama than any president in history,” when in fact that distinction goes to George W. Bush. When Obama criticized Arizona’s draconian immigration laws, Iowa congressman Steve King said Obama “has a default mechanism in him ... that favors the black person.” And in response to the Gates incident, Glenn Beck said that Obama “has a deep-seated hatred for white people or the white culture.”

This was the media, Congress, and electorate that Obama had to contend with. How much, realistically, could he explicitly say or do for African-Americans under such circumstances? “I’m deeply conflicted over this fact,” Coates told James Bennet, editor of *The Atlantic*, in a public discussion. “It’s smart politics for him not to talk about race.”

No one contests that Obama is navigating rather treacherous political narrows, but his critics still believe he could have done things differently. “All presidents bear burdens of some sort,” says Fredrick Harris, the political scientist at Columbia. “Race was one with Obama. But from my perspective, why should black constituents bear the burden of his risk aversion when it comes to issues of race?”

Indeed, some civil-rights leaders see the Black Lives Matter movement (and its abiding impact on the 2016 campaign) as a rebuke to Obama, a symptom of his inability thus far to satisfactorily address racial inequality in this country. “By now, it’s safe to say that black people have wanted Obama to do more,” says Alicia

“Every black person has this job whether they want it or not—and he’s the president. History is going to think it’s his job.”



Anthea Butler, PROFESSOR OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Garza, one of the movement’s co-founders. “For the last eight years, everything and nothing has been about race.” She looks at the deaths of young black men and women we’ve recently witnessed—children, some of them, with Skittles in their pockets—and feels deep disappointment in Obama’s reactions to them. “Too often,” she says, “he uses these occasions not to push for greater accountability within law enforcement, but to push a narrative that black people should behave more responsibly.” She understands that law enforcement is a constituency the president cannot afford to alienate. “But that assumption erases the power dynamic in this country,” she says, “and it places the responsibility on black people, who are without economic power, political power, and social power to impact their own conditions.”

These law-enforcement excesses are set against the larger backdrop of an incarceration pandemic: If you are an African-American male, you stand a one in three chance of cycling through prison at some point. But the president’s record on this matter has been mixed. Yes, it was under Obama that Congress passed the Fair Sentencing Act in 2010, which reduced the disparities in punishments for crack- and powder-cocaine possession. But the law did not apply retroactively. After the law passed, thousands still languished in confinement though they no longer met the criteria of such harsh sentences, and Obama, who had the unique power of clemency to set them free, wasn’t doing so. “The administration could have acted much more boldly to commute the sentences of the thousands of people still serving time under the old, unfair crack law,” says Jeremy Haile, federal advocacy counsel for the Sentencing Project.

The other policy disappointment—not unrelated—that inevitably comes up is the issue of African-American unemployment. Talk to black lawmakers, and this is the first thing they mention: How they wish Obama had made extra efforts to strengthen job-creation programs in their struggling districts, where some of those high-profile murders were taking place. The White House would usually respond to this complaint with “a rising tide lifts all boats.” The answer always left Jim Clyburn, a South Carolina Democrat who ranks third in the House, underwhelmed. “If a boat has several holes in the bottom,” he told me, “it ain’t lifting.”

But the most wrenching reactions to Obama centered on how he did or did not respond to the numerous highly visible acts of violence and injustice against African-Americans during his tenure. Charles Coleman Jr., a civil-rights attorney in New York, talked about two critical moments in Obama’s presidency. “So, George Zimmerman is acquitted,” he says about the man who killed Trayvon Martin. “There is a significant faction of the country that’s at a loss: How do we have a dialogue on this? And the president delivers an incredible speech.” Extemporaneously, from the looks of it. He said Trayvon could have been *him* 35 years ago. “It represented the pinnacle of where he’s been on race. It was an example of the president speaking to black America as a black American, from within our community. He made us feel like he really does get it.”

Then there was Ferguson. Even by Obama standards, the president seemed to react to the shooting of an unarmed black man and the subsequent anger with unusual caution. Obama expressed his distress about the incident, but he also pleaded for calm and chastised those who rioted—a reaction that devastated many African-Americans, who thought he was emphasizing the stereotype of black lawlessness. “It delegitimized the frustrations of black people and the reasons for their frustration,” says Coleman. “It fed into the narrative of, ‘These are angry black people in the streets.’”

Jon Favreau, the president’s former head speechwriter, understands this point of view but believes the president had little choice. “An American city was *on fire*,” he says. “He’s the president. He doesn’t want to further incite violence or instability.” He says people often fail to grasp this: how a few words from the president can crater the stock market or exacerbate a conflict.

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“Why should black constituents bear the burden of his risk aversion when it comes to issues of race?”



Fredrick Harris, DIRECTOR
OF THE CENTER ON AFRICAN
AMERICAN POLITICS AND SOCIETY,
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

As for the overall arc of Obama's rhetoric on race, Favreau rejects the conventional wisdom: "There's this view that he was courageous to speak out about race before he got to the White House, then he was quiet, and then, after the 2014 midterms, he was free to speak again," he says. "I never bought into that theory. He had to take on events as they came. There was a financial crisis. An oil spill. Afghanistan. Bin Laden. Health care." Then came a visible succession of killings of young, unarmed African-Americans. And Obama addressed those too. "I find it frustrating when people say he's finding his voice and that he's finally comfortable" discussing race, agrees Jarrett. "He has always felt perfectly comfortable speaking out when he thought it could make a difference."

Paul Butler, who worked at the Department of Justice under both Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, says much of the frustration African-Americans were expressing post-Ferguson was the culmination of many years' worth of irritation, not over Obama's caution, necessarily, but his penchant for "respectability politics." ("Brothers should pull up their pants" was one of his more memorable lines during the campaign.) That a man with the power to address structural inequality would instead talk about behavior really rankled, Butler says, echoing Garza. He cites Obama's commencement speech at Morehouse College in 2013, in which the president said, "Nobody cares if you suffered some discrimination."

"It's impossible imagining Hillary going to Wellesley or Smith and saying, 'Stop whining about the patriarchy and the glass ceiling. Nobody cares,'" says Butler, who now teaches at Georgetown University Law Center. "She would not say it."

"Yes, she would!" protests Jarrett. "She'd talk about resilience! If you read the whole speech, it was to strengthen them, to make them feel resilient."

Butler disagrees. "Obama has a famous swag," he says. "It's a signal he sends to us with his walk that says, 'I got this.' He had it with trade, with immigration, with health care. But he doesn't have it when he talks about race."

How does he look then? I ask.

"He looks tired," says Butler. "He looks weary. It's almost like he suffers from the racial fatigue whites say they suffer from."

"During that first election season," says Nicole Austin-Hillery, the director of the Brennan Center for Justice's Washington, D.C., office, "my husband and I would go to dinner parties in lovely homes with all these super-well-educated African-Americans, and so many of them talked about how, 'Oh, Obama's going to do this on race, he's going to do this for black America.' And my husband and I were the only two who said he has to govern the way he ran—and he didn't run on racial-justice issues or reform issues."

It's possible—reasonable to assume, even—that Obama never wanted to initiate a huge national conversation about race. Maybe he simply wanted to be a great president, defining "great" however

he wished. In *The Price of the Ticket: Barack Obama and the Rise and Decline of Black Politics*, Fredrick Harris notes that Obama didn't really speak about racial inequality during his first presidential campaign unless he had to. His most impassioned speech on the subject, back in June 2007, came after he'd spent a quarter of the year trailing Hillary Clinton among black supporters. "It grew stronger when he needed black support to shore up his viability as a candidate," writes Harris. "It grew dimmer after black supporters got behind his candidacy en masse."

Even in his speeches about race, Obama often pushes a more universalist message. In his commemorative remarks in Selma this spring, for instance, he turned the marchers' struggle into a metaphor for all struggles of the disempowered in the United States: "The American instinct that led these young men and women to pick up the torch and cross this bridge, that's the same instinct that moved patriots to choose revolution over tyranny. It's the same instinct that drew immigrants from across oceans and the Rio Grande; the same instinct that led women to reach for the ballot, workers to organize against an unjust status quo; the same instinct that led us to plant a flag at Iwo Jima and on the surface of the moon."

"He's kind of a black Reagan," says Anthea Butler. "He likes to believe in big, lofty things."

In his work, Gates has examined "the burden of representation," which he once defined as "the homely notion that you represent your race, thus that your actions can betray your race or honor it." It is why Obama is being asked repeatedly whether he's done enough for black America. It is why Jarrett answers repeatedly that she is not sure why it's his job. And it is why Anthea Butler ruefully responds, in turn: "Every black person has this job whether they want it or not—and he's the president. History is going to think it's his job. We're going to talk about him for the next 500 years."

But as Coleman points out, there is no consensus on how to do this job. "The enigma of President Obama on race," he explains, "may be reflective of a larger question of how black Americans engage the conversation of race themselves. We are not a monolithic group, as anyone with a brain can figure out." To take some crude examples from public life: Jesse Jackson is not Colin Powell is not Ben Carson. "There are those of us who feel like we don't have to make it always about race," he says, "and then there are those for whom it's the opposite: Race accounts for everything and anything." Coleman then turns to the question of Obama. "The difficulty with the president is that I'm not sure I know where he stands."

But this, of course, is what being human is: reconciling contradictions in our muddled identities, containing multitudes. This, in fact, is what Obama is known for—he sees things on one hand and then on the other, he empathizes with all points of view. At its heart, Obama's autobiography, *Dreams From My Father*, was about reckoning with the basic question of who he was. This summer, he revisited his adolescent confusion when speaking to Marc Maron. Noting that Maron's studio wasn't far from his old stomping grounds at Occidental College, the president mentioned that those years raised a lot of questions for him, like: "Who am I really? A lot of that revolved around issues of race." He then elaborated on those issues, channeling the inner dialogue of his younger self: "I am an African-American, but not grounded in a place with a lot of African-American culture"—Hawaii, he meant. "So I'm trying to figure out: All right, I'm seen and viewed and understood as a black man in America. What does that mean?"

Back in 2006, I interviewed Obama for this magazine. I asked him if he'd ever read Gates's essay in *The New Yorker* about Colin Powell. He hadn't, though he loved Gates's work. I mentioned a critical distinction that Gates made: Jackson wanted to be the first black president. Powell, if he were to run, wanted to be the first president who happened to be black.

"I don't think that those two are necessarily opposing," Obama

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told me. “I don’t want people to pretend I’m not black or that it’s somehow not relevant. But ultimately, I’d want to be a really great president, you know? And then I’d worry about all the other stuff. Because there are a lot of mediocre or poor presidents.”

To borrow a favorite phrase of the president’s, let me be clear: Obama is tremendously popular with African-Americans. Right now, his approval rate is 91 percent among them, and he’s rarely fallen below 80 percent. Even his critics in this story are still his supporters. Van Jones is his dogged defender on television. Jim Clyburn notes repeatedly that Obama rescued us during a recession, pulled us out of Iraq. Paul Butler, from Georgetown University Law Center, has an Obama action figure sitting on his kitchen table. Whenever he discovers it’s been knocked over, he makes a point of standing it back on its feet.

Anthea Butler notes that there’s a generation of black Americans who don’t just love the president but wish badly to protect him—not just psychologically but physically. “If you talk to an older black person,” she tells me, “somebody who’s 70 or older, they’re gonna be like, ‘Honestly, we just want him to get out alive.’”

Al Sharpton, one of Obama’s staunchest defenders and a sometime adviser, argues that there is much to be grateful for in this presidency. “You know how many black people tell me, ‘I didn’t have health insurance until now?’” The Affordable Care Act is projected to give an estimated 2.9 million more African-Americans coverage by 2016, significantly narrowing the coverage gap between blacks and whites. “It’s extremely strange to hear people question President Obama who never questioned Bill Clinton,” he continues. “Under Bill Clinton, we got the crime bill that gave us three strikes and you’re out, and the welfare-reform bill. I too would have liked to see the Obama years do more. I agree with that. But Barack Obama never gave us a bill that *hurt* us.”

Sharpton has gotten a lot of grief for his support of Obama. Cornel West, whose manifold political objections to the president are at this point hard to separate from his personal ones, went so far as to call the reverend “the bona fide house Negro of the Barack Obama plantation.” But Sharpton says he’s come by his support for the president through some hard-won local lessons. “When I sat in New York with the first and only black mayor,” he tells me, referring to David Dinkins, “we tried to push him on various issues.” Dinkins kept trying to push back, saying he had to govern for all New Yorkers. It was the same defense as Obama’s. “So we started calling him names,” says Sharpton, “and we started saying, ‘You shoulda done this that and the other.’” He pauses. “And we ended up with 20 years of Rudy Giuliani and Michael Bloomberg.”

Obama’s supporters can point to a number of his accomplishments with regard to race. His attorney general Eric Holder rebuilt the civil-rights division within the DOJ; in 2013, Holder also announced the Smart on Crime initiative, which instructs federal prosecutors to avoid bringing charges that would trigger manda-

tory minimum penalties in the case of certain low-level crimes. Then there is the possibility of the criminal-justice-reform bill. “If he can sign a bipartisan bill by Christmas,” says Jones, “it’ll make up for the frustrations of the middle years.”

In February 2014, the White House started the My Brother’s Keeper initiative, a public-private effort that both partners with communities and helps nourish existing federal programs that boost the prospects of young men of color. (This summer, for instance, the new attorney general, Loretta Lynch, announced a pilot program that would give Pell grants to prisoners.) It won’t end when Obama leaves the White House. This May, Obama announced the formation of the My Brother’s Keeper Alliance, a nonprofit powered by an all-star advisory board (John Legend, Colin Powell, Shaq) and millions of corporate dollars that will attempt to close the opportunity gap for young men of color.

“This will remain a mission for me and Michelle not just for the rest of my presidency,” he said when announcing the program, “but for the rest of my life.” How large a role it will play in Obama’s post-presidential life has yet to be determined. But its conception is entirely consistent with the president’s ideals and *modus operandi*. It turns him into a community organizer again—but, this time, with millions of dollars and the Rolodex of a former president of the United States.

These accomplishments may not be as epic as some have wished. But even the presidency has its limitations. When Jarrett told the audience in Aspen that it isn’t Obama’s responsibility to change race relations in the United States, it may have seemed like a punt. He is, after all, the man with the electoral mandate, the bully pulpit, the veto pen, the executive order, and, for his first two years, the Democratic majority in both chambers of Congress. But her response also had the effect of lobbing the question right back to her mostly white audience. Because here’s how she followed up: “The question is: What are *we* gonna do? It’s a collective responsibility. This is not something where suddenly, because the country elected him president, our history just evaporates. It has to happen family by family.”

The hardest part, for those who root for Obama, is that before long, these issues will no longer be his responsibility at all, at least as commander-in-chief. Sharpton believes African-Americans will sorely miss the simple image of a black family going in and out of the White House each day. Obama’s triumph, as far as he’s concerned, was a mute, daily reminder of the possibility of black ascendancy, an invisible psychological superstructure onto which a whole generation of black children could unconsciously graft their aspirations. “When all the smoke clears and Barack Obama’s gone,” says Sharpton, “a white president will succeed a black president. We’ve never been here before. And what will that do emotionally and otherwise in the black community that is already up in arms? When we don’t even have the symbolic charge of seeing a black man and woman, two girls, on the news every night?”

In the meantime, there is, to borrow another Obama trope, still possibility for change. “I think you’re going to see a lot of things happen in this last 15 months, and he’s going to go all out to address the problems he’s been reluctant to give extensive statements about,” says Elijah Cummings, who represents Baltimore and was head of the Congressional Black Caucus when Obama first ran for Senate. “I just do.”

He tells a story about the night of Obama’s first inauguration. “I’ll never forget: My wife and I were at the White House with him, after he finished all the parties. And he said, ‘Elijah, I don’t know how much I’m going to be able to do. But I’m going to do everything in my power to make the world a better place for the community you’re in.’” Whatever disappointments there have been in the years since, he believes that is still Obama’s goal. “Sometimes,” says Cummings, “he’s just doing things quietly.” ■

“I think you have to ask yourself: Why is that all on him?”

Valerie Jarrett,
SENIOR ADVISER
TO THE PRESIDENT





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The Unprecedented



Hallberg in
Tompkins
Square Park
last month.

Garth Risk Hallberg



'CITY ON FIRE,'
a debut novel,
generated a
headline-making
\$2 million bidding war.
Which means
quite a lot is riding
on its 36-year-old
author. Believe
it or not, he's chasing
even bigger things.

By **BORIS KACHKA**

I NEVER WANTED TO be the guy wearing a T-shirt that read **ASK ME ABOUT MY NOVEL,**" says Garth Risk Hallberg. One August evening in 2012, he was that guy. He'd been invited to the wedding of writer-banker Gary Sernovitz and academic Molly Pulda at the Bowery Hotel. Among his tablemates were Diana Miller, his future editor; Tom Bissell, whom he'd just reviewed in the *Times*; and Chris Parris-Lamb, a young literary agent whose recent success with Chad Harbach's *The Art of Fielding* was well known to all—including the writer seated across from him. A souvenir "dictionary" defined each guest. Hallberg's entry read: "Critic-novelist certain he will win the Postmodernist Fiction Trivia Contest to be held in the men's bathroom at 11:59 tonight."

At the time, the “novelist” part was notional. Hallberg’s wife was the only one at the wedding who had seen the thousand-page stack of text and graphics that would become *City on Fire*, a sprawling, populous mystery culminating in New York’s 1977 blackout, for which Knopf would later pay \$2 million—probably the highest North American advance ever for a debut novel. Hallberg had been thinking about it for nine years and quietly writing it for five. But at the wedding, he was just a gangly 33-year-old blogger-critic with two kids and five figures of debt, a junior-varsity member of Table 14.

Hallberg and Parris-Lamb were paired up, Pulda says, because they were “two tall skinny guys” from North Carolina. “He is from an even shittier town than I am,” says Parris-Lamb, “so we were doing the competitive thing: ‘I made it further than you’ or ‘I started lower than you.’ Which, of course, as white men we should never do, but you know what I mean.” Parris-Lamb was sleek and tailored, as always. Hallberg wore secondhand off-white velvet pants. A few drinks later, Hallberg got up the nerve to pop the question, and before long they were “totally breaking it down on the dance floor.”

All meet-cute stories have at least two versions. Hallberg remembers asking, “So, what would you do with a thousand-page manuscript?” To which Parris-Lamb replied, “Is it yours?” Parris-Lamb recalls a general question about agents. “I said, ‘Why don’t you just tell me about the book?’ He said, ‘Well, it may be unpublishably long.’ And I laughed and said something like, ‘Go big or go home.’”

Parris-Lamb sent it out the following autumn, and it went big. Of the 14 editors who read the manuscript, 12 wanted it. Seven houses (representing nine editors) bid more than \$1 million at auction before Knopf won for twice that—more than three times what Harbach was paid. Scott Rudin optioned the film rights for six figures the day after getting the manuscript; 17 other countries have already bought it. Knopf has given away 6,500 advance copies, more than most first novels ever sell, and has scheduled an 18-city tour and an ad campaign as tentacular, to use a Hallberg word, as the book itself. But while Knopf is fronting the cash, almost everyone in publishing is invested in its success (even those who work for Knopf’s rivals and those who grumble about too many eggs in too few baskets). There are only so many \$2 million bets any house can afford to lose.

But why this novel, at this time? One of the ironies of Hallberg’s windfall is that he mastered a winner-takes-all system in a winner-takes-all city by selling a vivid and

intricate dream of its opposite: dangerous, democratic ’70s New York. Secondhand nostalgia for that dark decade surely appealed to Parris-Lamb and the mostly young editors who bid up its price, the first generation to know New York only as a padded playground. It might also suit the tastes of readers primed by art shows, TV series, and essays besotted with the era. Packed with violence, arson, drugs, and corruption but also love, sex, punk rock, “found” art, and literal fireworks, *City on Fire* can look like an object machine-tooled for maximum market impact. But that would probably be unfair to the writer and even the publisher. Better to say that Hallberg made a very long and sincere novelistic case for grandeur, connectedness, and fiction itself in a fragmented, reality-hungry world, and the industry bought it.

Hallberg says he wrote *City on Fire* under the “necessary fiction” that no one would ever publish it—“a very useful position for me in doing whatever the fuck I wanted.” A few SAT words aside, the most obvious obstacle is its length; to look at a few recent very long best sellers and award winners, though, that might actually be an asset. It certainly telegraphs audacity. *City on Fire* was sold on comparisons to Donna Tartt’s *The Goldfinch* and Tom Wolfe’s *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, but its own vanities—its vocabulary, wingspan, and philosophical top notes—speak to Hallberg’s obsessions with Don DeLillo and David Foster Wallace and the great Victorian “triple-deckers.” Asked to explain its commercial appeal, Knopf’s reticent editor-in-chief, Sonny Mehta, tapped an unlit cigarette and shifted uncomfortably behind his desk. “Well, look,” he said, “it’s the *ambition* of it.”

Ambition is a loaded word. You can be ambitious for artistic achievement or for fame, money, power, immortality. Hallberg is refreshingly direct about what he’s after. “My goal,” he says, “was to get the book somewhere that is going to allow me to be DeLillo 40 years from now.” Whether that goal is advanced by a \$2 million book deal is an open question.

WHO DIDN’T EXIST at the convergence of a thousand thousand stories?” asks *City on Fire*’s gnarled detective, contemplating the “ley-lines” that

link its sundry players—a corporate dynasty, an anarchist collective, a misfit teen, a boozy New Journalist—to a Central Park shooting on New Year’s Eve 1976. The novel is a 911-page mosaic in which punk lyrics clash with Latin, grime with glitz,

a 25-page pasted-together zine with a medical report, a nihilistic terror plot with a naked plea for empathy.

It’s also something of a page-turner, by virtue of its plot twists and its sheer accumulation of stuff (see review on page 129). The novel amasses evidence concerning not just the mystery of who shot 17-year-old Samantha Cicciario but many other crimes both committed and foiled. Among them are the burning of the Bronx, a bombing in midtown, financial skulduggery, infidelity, and looting—more broadly, the piecemeal destruction of the city’s social fabric. Hallberg renders that chaos not as dystopia but its opposite, Bad Old New York as a city of dreamers—a pair of truant Long Island teens, a gay black Southerner, a wealthy heir hooked on punk and heroin—looking not for careers or ways to afford rent but for answers, connections, and meaning. *City on Fire*’s biggest mystery is whether blackout-era New York is worth saving, and Hallberg’s answer seems to be: now more than ever.

Exactly 38 years after the blackout, this past July 13, Hallberg was wilting slightly in a sunbaked, manicured corner of Tompkins Square Park, trying to define his style. “There’s a great description of the album *Born to Run*,” he said, then quoted Greil Marcus verbatim: “A ’57 Chevy running on melted down Crystals records.’ It’s one of my favorite albums, but it feels instantly recognizable, because it speaks the language of Phil Spector and Duane Eddy and all the great one-hit wonders. And just supercolliding them ... Springsteen was so obsessive about every note. You would never call that album experimental or avant-garde, but somehow in the context of Captain & Tennille or—uhm ...” He paused as the disco strings of Michael Jackson’s “Don’t Stop ‘Til You Get Enough” suddenly erupted nearby. “Yes, that!”

The music was blaring from a speaker mounted on a passing bicycle. “I want that for my bike, that’s awesome,” he said, a toothy grin breaking his middle-distance stare. But it didn’t throw his conversation off course; not much can. “Hold that thought,” he’ll say to an interjected question, just barely flashing impatience before rolling into his next paragraph.

Hallberg is more adept than most at banishing distraction. He wakes up to work long before his family does and checks his email only at rare intervals. He still owns a tiny flip phone, and he guards his time, attention, and privacy by burrowing into what one friend calls a “pre-connected universe.”

A charming, insistent monologist, Hallberg strings together serial analogies.



He sees connections everywhere and wants you to see them, too. He talks with his long arms, waving dramatically to indicate a far-off time or clawing at the air to pull home an idea. He has a born proselytizer's synthesis of earnest passion, perfect timing, cleverness, and self-deflation. "There's almost no snark in him, no sarcasm," a friend told me. "He's smart, self-possessed, confident, and not impressed with himself," Rudin said. When I said that sounded almost like an oxymoron, he said, "That's what I mean."

Hallberg was born outside Baton Rouge and grew up in Greenville, North Carolina. His parents had met as students in Ohio, his dad an M.F.A. candidate and his mother an English-major undergrad. After his father found a tenure-track position at East Carolina University, his mother—"in certain ways the brains of the operation"—was sidelined into teaching high school. Hallberg hesitates to speak ill of Greenville, but he was clearly out of place. "It's a little like *Friday Night Lights*," he says over waf-

fles on the Lower East Side. "I felt like a total freak in a lot of ways." Home was uncomfortable "in a totally different way." His parents divorced when he was 13. "There was a lot of complicated stuff going on, and the byword was to pretend that it wasn't, and I was probably a more than ordinarily observant child. You don't end up in this job without having an unusual interest in observing people."

When Garth was 9, his father, Bill, published *The Rub of the Green*, a novel in the mode of Richard Ford about a pro golfer imprisoned in the aftermath of a love triangle. Walker Percy blurbed it and, according to Bill (who "was not always reliable"), it was optioned for the movies. "He was a person with a lot of very complicated, persistent feelings about himself," says Garth, "and he really thought this book was going to cover him in glory and that he had reached the top of the mountain and it was all smooth sailing from there. This wasn't like a commercial thing—it was like a Kafkaesque dream landscape, in which, for example,

▲
18-year-old
Hallberg,
far right,
with friends
in 1997.

he was gonna say, 'Mom, Dad, look, I finally made something of myself.'"

The book has since gone out of print, and Bill never published another novel. "The discovery for

him that there is no mountaintop was kind of devastating, and he had a really hard time doing the next book."

Hallberg "stuck out in a lot of ways scholastically." As a preteen he gorged on mysteries—and brought a deerstalker hat to a book club where he was the youngest member "by four decades"—before graduating, in high school, to the Beats and avant-garde poets (and berets). He says he was "the resident beatnik of North Carolina"—perhaps reacting to his mother's specialty in Victorian writers. Then came punk, via Patti Smith and the local record store. "I was like, 'I don't want to be at home, so I might as well go through the vinyl,'" he says. He taught himself Rolling Stones riffs on his father's girlfriend's guitar. "And various

"My goal was to get the book somewhere that is going to allow me to be DeLillo 40 years from now."

other things had happened," he says vaguely. "I was kind of a disaster ... I somehow managed to elude getting arrested." Whatever was going on, the real drama seemed to be happening elsewhere, in the cities that produced the art he loved—especially New York, where, in his own fantastical version of it, "James Baldwin and E. B. White and Patti Smith and Robert Rauschenberg could have passed each other on a street corner."

The summer he was 16, his mother packed him off to a weeklong writing program at Duke, and Hallberg's life changed instantly. He felt he had finally found his people, misfit nerds channeling their rebellion into work. "I remember them as having this incredibly pure golden light of wholesomeness beaming through their pores," he says. "It was okay to care about stuff—it was a socially normed thing." His fastest friend was Derek Teslik, who attended St. Albans, the Washington prep school that was at the center of D.C.'s latter-day hardcore scene. (Nineties post-punk worked in mysterious ways.) Fugazi was still gigging; Jonathan Fire*Eater, the band most likely to succeed them, had recently left for New York, where they'd become what the *New York Observer* called "one of the fastest rise-and-fall stories in recent pop music."

The following year, his Fridays having been freed up for "independent study," Hallberg would wake up at 4:30—"my writing time now"—and make the four-hour drive to the nation's capital. "Here I have my little life in Tobacco Road, where I'm losing my shit mentally," says Hallberg, "but D.C. was kind of the first real metropolis for me. There were all these friends and intermecine tensions, and they were like, 'Who is this beatnik road warrior?'" He may have seen himself that way, but to those new friends he likely came across as an easygoing shapeshifter, comfortable in many skins. "He could seamlessly flow from world to world," says Walker Lambert, a St. Albans alum who was the best man at Hallberg's wedding. "From a punk scene to a cocktail party at a nice house to a football game, he could merge into almost any scene and not seem like a complete outsider."

Hallberg's prose still has that impersonating impulse—what he calls "a Dickensian thing, the ragpicker." His osmotic travels didn't stop in D.C. His first visit to New York

inspired him to write a Frank O'Hara-style poem cycle. "I had one week in the fall of 1996," he says, "where I was like, 'I'm America's greatest living teenage poet.'" To natives, New York was becoming safe, denatured, but to the young writer and his friends, it still felt feral. Ostensibly visiting colleges, they would decamp at the Port Authority, "and the first thing you would see would be Peepland." Nursing cans of Foster's, they would bar- and park-hop from Columbia to the Village. Their more colorful anecdotes worked their way into *City on Fire*. So did pieces of Teslik's '90s zine, *Helter Skelter* (giving the novel's version an oddly indie-rock vibe). So did a defiantly timeless sense of possibility. "There's like an internet thing: *This*," says Hallberg. "What is it—a meme or a hashtag? That was New York for me when I got off the bus. *This. THIS!*"

City on Fire is a gossamer-veiled homage to September 11—an event Hallberg only saw from a television set in D.C.'s Watergate complex. While studying on scholarship at Washington University in St. Louis, he met Elise White, now his wife, and after graduation they moved to the capital while she pursued an American-studies Ph.D. and he marked time at an internet trade-digest operation. Visiting New York after 9/11, he says, he bore witness to that feeling of suspension we've since heard so much about, even as it feels less and less real to those who were there: "That sense of people living closer to the surface of their skin and feeling like they're in the middle of a change and they weren't sure how it was gonna work out. This is really what the prologue of the book deals with." That prologue ends with a Whitmanesque appeal to New York dreamers of every era. "Who doesn't still dream of a world other than this one?" asks an unknown narrator. "Who among us—if it means letting go of the insanity, the mystery, the totally useless beauty of the million once-possible New Yorks—is ready even now to give up hope?"

In 2003, Hallberg was taking a Greyhound into New York, his first daylight bus visit since his college days. On the looping Jersey-side approach to the Lincoln Tunnel, his iPod turned up Billy Joel's "Miami 2017 (Seen the Lights Go Out on Broadway)," an apocalyptic dirge written not long before the blackout that describes the abandonment and sinking of Manhattan. "It's Joel at his

most florid," says Hallberg, laughing. But just then, the city's skyline slid into view, as it always had—only this time, without those two towers. He's told this story before, both a straightforward origin story and a preemptive testament to his own sincerity. "It's just sort of apothecic," Hallberg says. "The whole book more or less came to me in that moment. Henry James says something like, 'A sense of possession takes hold.'" He went directly to Union Square Park and wrote one long scene in his notebook. Then he stopped. *I don't have the chops to write this*, he thought. *I don't even live here*.

A

FTER OUR first meeting, Hallberg emailed me a short essay he wrote on a slack day at his internet job. He introduced it by explaining, "I was 22 or 23, trying to record and understand a felt

phenomenon. And perhaps this falls under the heading of personal mythology ... but I now feel a high degree of dramatic irony here." The essay is about a feeling he'd had since age 6—"this sudden sense of remembering" things that had never happened to him. It begins, "I wonder, is nostalgia the right word if you never in the first place lived the thing you're missing?"

The year after the Billy Joel epiphany, Hallberg won a fellowship to earn an M.F.A. at NYU, where he studied with the novelist Brian Morton. "He had a kind of ceaseless interest in trying new things," says Morton, and his short stories bear that out. One is structured as a final exam. Another is a filibuster delivered by a would-be school shooter. There's a "love song" composed of (mostly fabricated) quotes from former Bush press secretary Ari Fleischer, dialogue in a Russian accent, and a piece with subtitles named after Smiths songs. Hallberg's 2007 novella *A Field Guide to the North American Family* tracks suburbanites coming of age in cross-referenced dictionary entries. Most of these experiments are sorcerer's-apprentice work, magic slightly beyond his control. But they point to a writer collecting and absorbing artifacts, *Born to Run* style, and making them his own. "Some writers would write four different kinds of

family stories, but you could easily tell which family they grew up in,” says Morton. “He had the ability to get into the experience of widely different characters in a way that felt very authentic.”

Morton lived through the blackout. He believes *City on Fire* “nailed it,” but he also found it “more traditional than I would have expected.” Hallberg’s turn toward social realism must have been self-conscious, coinciding as it did with his work as a critic pondering the future of the novel. Though he considers his reviewing career—mostly for the website the Millions—“very, very accidental,” his reputation quickly surpassed that of a typical blogger; he has twice been a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle’s critic award. A couple of his strongest pieces take other critics to task for making work sound more experimental than it is: James Wood overplaying the postmodernity of DeLillo’s *Underworld*, Zadie Smith overplaying the avant-gardeness of Tom McCarthy’s *Remainder*.

Hallberg never wrote a grand argument for the wide-lens social novel, as Wolfe and Jonathan Franzen have, but he takes the attention paid to *City on Fire* as evidence that “this battery is not devoid of juice.” Its supposed demise had less to do with demand or supply, he’d always suspected, than with publishing itself. “I assumed that

whatever mechanisms had existed for conveying this sort of book into the world had stopped doing so,” he says. His defenses of the readability of *Underworld* and *Infinite Jest* are calls to enlarge our idea of the mainstream. But he never seemed to doubt that his own book, if published, would find that mainstream on its own. “I think it is confident of being read,” he says. “There’s just something about it that strikes me as assuming that its audience exists. That’s the democratic thing. *Underworld* has that.”

There’s also something new that Hallberg wants to do with *City on Fire*. In 2012, he wrote an essay for the *Times Magazine* on the Franzen-Eugenides-Wallace cohort headlined “Why Write Novels at All?” He read into their generation a desire to make readers feel less lonely by showing them other lonely people. Hallberg wanted to turn that notion on its head. “Think about it,” he wrote. “I can love you because I want to feel less alone, or I can love you because I want *you* to feel less alone.” His elders, he concluded, fell short on that second kind of

love—empathy rather than self-consolation. What he didn’t quite say in the piece seems obvious now: This is where his kind of novel comes in. By entering the con-

sciousness of so many characters and building connections between them (“I see you. You are not alone,” read the last lines of *City on Fire*), he wants to teach readers empathy—to make us better people.

HALLBERG DESCRIBES his novel-writing process in the manner of an ecstatic mathematician. Working on graph paper (“there’s something pleasurable about filling the boxes”), he spent roughly six months on the first of the seven parts, typed it up, wrote the next one, typed up the two parts together, and so on. “I had never been as excited about a piece of writing,” he says. “I felt like Spider-Man, swinging through the city, throwing out a web and not knowing where it was going to hit. And it hits the next thing and you’re like—perfect.”

The working title in the box Hallberg delivered to Parris-Lamb was an abbreviated quote from E. B. White’s *Here Is New York*: “This city, which not to look upon would be like death.” Parris-Lamb wasn’t bowled over by the title—or the graphic elements or the length, especially—but the book grew and grew on him. He was unconvinced by a large plot point that “felt like it came from a different novel.” Hallberg also queried two very established agents and held off Parris-Lamb for months. He won’t say what the agent’s spe-

New York
City during
the 1977
blackout.



PHOTOGRAPH: AP PHOTO

"I felt like Spider-Man, swinging through the city, throwing out a web and not knowing where it was going to hit."

cific reservations were, but he eventually came back to Parris-Lamb with a solution. He wound up cutting not just the plot point but an entire character.

Parris-Lamb's pitch letter to the 14 publishers called *City on Fire* "a complex, utterly relevant social novel that can stand toe to toe with the best of the genre." A day after sending it, he got his first offer—from a producer. "I loved it," Scott Rudin told me. "It's a wonderful idea, and it's got this great high-low thing going on at the center of it." Rudin turned 19 the day the lights went out and he had to walk home from the Public Theater to the Upper West Side. "For years I've thought, *Is there a blackout movie?*"

When Parris-Lamb told Hallberg he was passing on a \$1 million preempt offer from Atavist Books, Hallberg hesitated. Would they definitely get back up to that level? But he also told Parris-Lamb: "I didn't need \$1 million. I needed \$50,000"—enough to pay off student loans and credit-card bills and maybe change apartments. It wasn't just confidence that had made him ready to share *City on Fire* by the time of Sernovitz's wedding. Since he'd started the book, he and White had had two sons, forcing a move deeper into Brooklyn. Morton had helped him get a few teaching jobs, but those and "pouring coffee" weren't enough. "At this point, I'm trapping mice in the morning so that my wife doesn't have to deal with them," he says, "and she's working on her dissertation and I'm thinking, *I'd better send this out, because something's got to change or we're gonna leave the city.*" So what's changed so far? "Aside from my Bentley and my six swimming pools," says Hallberg, "I'm still the same guy." But seriously: "I know what my hourly rate was," he says, having amortized the amount over seven years of writing. "It's not the astronomical thing that it would appear to be, but it ain't minimum wage. The city was gonna eat us alive, and this saved us."

Hallberg's decision, in 2007, to stake his family's future on the biggest idea he'd ever had was catalyzed by a crisis in the family he'd left behind. That year, his father was diagnosed with cancer. "My dad got sick, and it activated or entangled itself with a lot of other things that were going on in my life and in the life of other people who cared about my dad." He won't say much more,

except that he photocopied a 20-page section of *Infinite Jest*—a list of "lessons" from a halfway house—and sent them to another family member "in dire straits."

Six years later, as Hallberg made the rounds of one fawning publisher after another, his father was recovering from surgery; he'd given up on chemotherapy. "And all of this *whatever*," says Hallberg, "which I could do without—that was his dream. It was a dream come true, but it was somebody else's dream." Bill Hallberg died in May 2014, while Garth was deep into the editing process. "In a way, for it to remain purely theoretical so that he could imagine some world-bestrident thing was beautiful, because in actuality it's going to be all kinds of mixed shit, and there is no mountaintop, and my job is to write the next thing."

I'M GOING TO ALLOW myself exactly two beers," Hallberg says at our final meeting, dinner in the backyard of Park Slope's faux-rustic Flatbush Farm. Having initially banned on-the-record alcohol, he's changed his mind. His rules of press engagement are still in flux. "I'm just a very deliberate—as you've probably picked up on—person in a lot of ways."

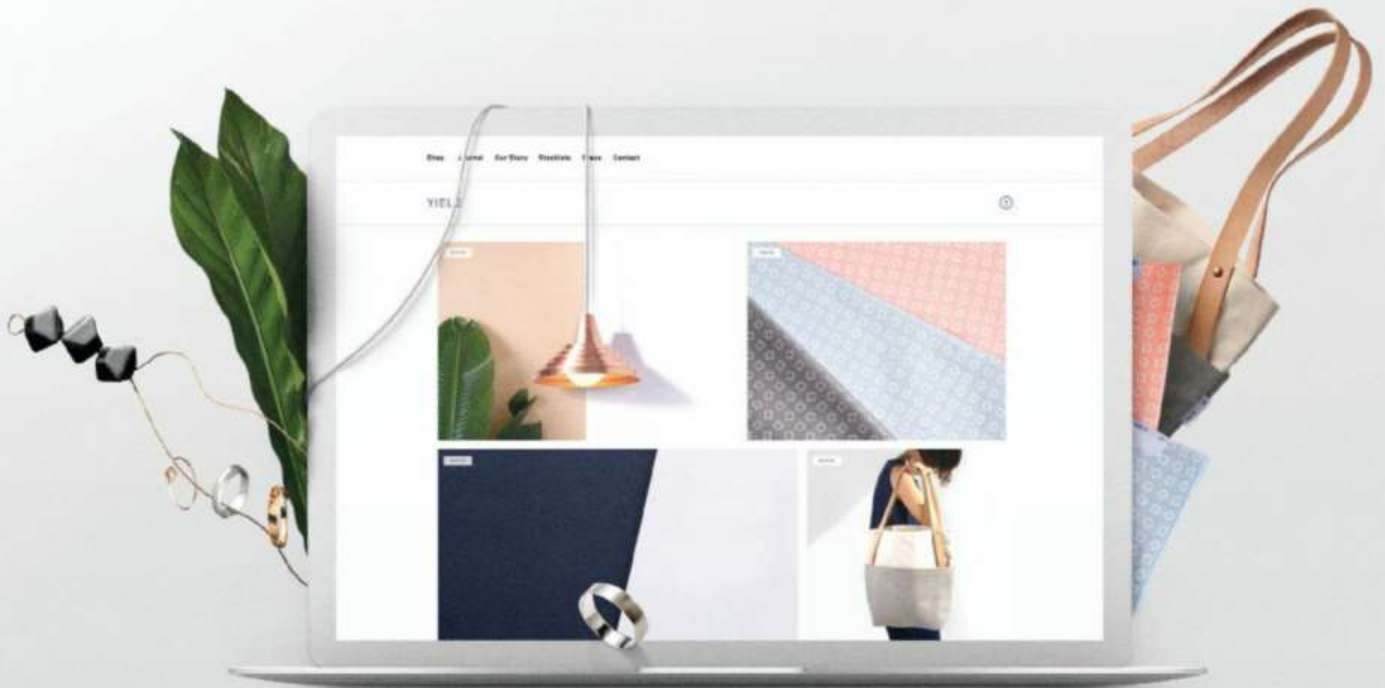
Like many younger writers, Hallberg longs for an older model of author celebrity. One of his reviews describes the tension between market pressures and dreams of immortality: "On the supply side, publishers rush to promote 'instant classics' before posterity can render a verdict. On the demand side, we feel grateful for the distraction of 'a good read.'" When he talks of envying DeLillo, it isn't just his longevity or reputation. "If it were 30 years ago, you could still do a full DeLillo" and decline most publicity, "and that in itself wouldn't be a calculated presentation," he says. "Now all of your options are subculture versus commercial publishing. Everything has already been subsumed into a panoply of brand positions." Twice, he tells me, while commuting from Sarah Lawrence, he saw DeLillo on the train, but decided against introducing himself. "He's given me so much, but whatever he has to give here isn't that—and it's just gonna make him uncomfortable."

Hallberg has already ridden the highs and lows of promotion. He attended the big trade fair BookExpo America and manned a busy signing booth. "There's probably an element of the Most Photographed Barn in America," Hallberg says, referring to the tautologically popular attraction in DeLillo's *White Noise*. "People don't know who the fuck you are, but they've been told everyone wants it." Over and over again, strangers who knew nothing about the book except for its buzz asked him: How does it feel? "It seemed like this Zen thing mixed with a D'Angelo song," he says. "How *does* it feel? How does it *feel*? How does it *feel*?"

It feels weird. Advance reviews on Amazon and Goodreads have been mixed; many of them bring up the hype and the money. To Derek Teslik, the noise and the backlash feel familiar: "The echo that I have is Jonathan Fire*Eater, this band we all knew growing up was the next big thing. Dream-Works won the bidding war, and it was huge. And then everyone realized they were just a band—a good band, but not the savior of the music industry." After they broke up, some of the band's members later reformed as the Walkmen—one of whose members will debut a new song in a *City on Fire* trailer. As for Hallberg, says Teslik, "I think he can handle it."

I heard this consistently from friends: Garth can handle it. "This is the rap that I give to my students," Hallberg says. "It's you and Virginia Woolf, man. And in all likelihood you won't be that great, but you will have gotten to dance with the very best. It may be that Tolstoy and Virginia Woolf were sitting around fretting about their Amazon reviews or their pre-pub whatever, but I kind of doubt it. I don't think that's how the work probably got made."

Not to say that worldly fame is never on his mind. "I saw this great documentary," he says—part two of *The Decline of Western Civilization*, Penelope Spheeris's trilogy on the rock life. "Gene Simmons gives this interview from this lingerie store and he says, Anyone who tells you it's lonely at the top, don't buy it. And then Dave Mustaine from Megadeth says, Anyone who wants to become a rock star, don't. And between those two poles lies the truth. But you know, there's always a Gene Simmons in my head. Good fortune is good fortune." ■



Build it beautiful





Steve Huffman
co-founded
Reddit.

Sold Reddit.

Watched
Reddit grow.

Watched
Reddit flounder.

Watched
Reddit mutiny.

Now he's back,
to try to
save Reddit
from itself.

Reddit Redux

By **BENJAMIN WALLACE**

Photograph by **Jake Stangel**

Huffman at Reddit headquarters,
where employees are invited to draw
Snooty, the company mascot.

NEW YORK

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OCTOBER 5-18, 2015

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TEVE HUFFMAN was on his couch when Reddit mutinied. Huffman had co-founded the popular news-ranking site with Alexis Ohanian in 2005 and left in 2009 after

selling it to Condé Nast. In the years since, he had watched from afar with a mix of pride, as the site grew into the 11th largest in the U.S.; remorse, for selling too early; and frustration, as

Reddit failed to mature and was repeatedly wracked by disruptive forces. Reddit is, above all, a collection of nearly 10,000 bulletin boards called sub-Reddits, which range from the general, like Politics and Technology and Food, to the more particular, like one called Whalebait, where people post snapshots of everyone's favorite cetacean. Users can vote posts up or down, and through crowd curation the most favored items ascend to Reddit's front page. In this way, the site has become the web's foremost meme engine, the place where things go viral, and with 200 million regular visitors, it is able to unblushingly call itself "the front page of the internet."

But more than other user-generated sites, such as YouTube and Wikipedia, Reddit over the years has developed a culture that can at times be untamable. It is one that venerates anonymity and free speech and the idea that you can find your tribe, however small and marginalized, within the site, and it is reflected in the company's power structure: The number of people the site employs is dwarfed by the horde of moderators who voluntarily tend to the individual sub-Reddits and make the whole thing run.

The Reddit mob has been responsible for charming acts of mass whimsy (there's a sub-Reddit for Redditors to send pizzas to each other, unbidden) and semi-regular demonstrations of the uplifting powers of a beneficently mobilized crowd (more than 200,000 people took part in last year's Secret Santa gift exchange). It has also accommodated some of the most odi-

ous content on the internet, including the sub-Reddits Jailbait, Pics of Dead Kids, Fat People Hate, Beating Women, Gas the Kikes, Trans Fags, and Watch Niggers Die—all of which Reddit eventually banned, but only after much fretting over whether doing so would compromise the site's ethics and drive away its users.

Over the years, whenever crises around controversial sub-Reddits would make the news, Huffman mostly empathized with his successors at the company: Dealing with toxic content was a nettlesome issue, and he was glad he wasn't the one who had to figure out how to do it. Plus he was busy with his new company, Hipmunk, an airfare-comparison site. But Huffman's perspective shifted over the July 4 weekend, after he learned that a Reddit employee named Victoria Taylor had been fired.

Taylor had a critical role at the company: She ran the popular Ask Me Any-



"Don't sell too early"
Huffman told
his audience at
a commencement
speech last year.

thing sub-Reddit, wherein a vacuum-cleaner salesman or, say, the president of the United States fields questions from Redditors. She was also seen by her moderator colleagues as one of the only people at headquarters who understood just how desperately moderators needed better tools to keep the site running smoothly in the face of increasingly provocative factions within the ever-larger community. Though it now appears Taylor was dismissed because she was resistant to innovations like adding videos to the AMAs (Taylor didn't respond to interview requests), she was fired with no public explanation, and her sudden dismissal brought moderators' simmering grievances to a boil. In an event that would come to be called AMAgeddon, a rolling blackout began, and by Friday night, moderators had shut off the lights in hundreds of the most popular sub-Reddits in protest. News spread to Huffman. "Seriously, like 50 people texted me and said you need to go back to Reddit," he says. The next day, he was up in Sonoma for a friend's 30th-birthday party, and "a lot of the conversation was, 'What the hell is going on at Reddit right now?'"

Huffman had always thought he'd come back eventually. After then-CEO Yishan Wong left Reddit in late 2014, Ohanian had returned as executive chairman, and since then, he'd repeatedly asked his old friend to join him as CEO. Huffman had always declined, citing Hipmunk, but now he found himself scared for Reddit's future. An insurrection was under way. "I felt like, *This is getting out of control, I think it is repairable, but I need to do something now*," Huffman says. "That's when I finally called and said, 'Fine, I'll do it.'" It was Sunday, and the first person he could reach by phone was board member Sam Altman.

Of course, Reddit already had a CEO at the time: Ellen Pao, who had stepped in as interim leader after Wong's departure and who had previously worked at the venture-capital firm Kleiner Perkins. While at Reddit, Pao was in the news for having filed a gender-discrimination suit against Kleiner; though the jury ruled against her, her suit had brought attention to the challenges women face in Silicon Valley, and Pao's experience over the next few days would play out as a nightmare version of some of those same issues. There was a feeling within Reddit that she wasn't of Reddit—that it wasn't a site she would choose to spend a lot of time on if it weren't her job and that she failed to grasp the importance of managing its relationship with moderators. She became an easy scapegoat for the pre-

dominantly young and male Redditors, who, very maturely, had taken to calling her Chairman Pao. A Change.org petition for her to resign quickly gained more than 200,000 signatures.

On Monday, July 6, Pao apologized for Reddit's negligent handling of moderators, but by then Huffman was waiting in the wings. Altman announced her departure that Friday while simultaneously announcing Huffman's return. The next week, Ohanian acknowledged that the decision to fire Taylor had been his, calling the company's general insensitivity to moderators' needs "a big screwup," which he took "a ton of responsibility for." In a good-bye post on Reddit, Pao wrote that she had "seen the good, the bad and the ugly" among Redditors and that "the ugly made me doubt humanity."

The bile thrown at Pao unnerved everyone. "She did some things I don't think were particularly good decisions," Altman says, "but CEOs make bad decisions, and I don't think the community would have treated her as it did if she were a man." Wong took to Reddit to suggest a theory that Pao's exit was the penultimate falling domino in a long con by Reddit's founders, who had orchestrated a series of events with the ultimate goal of prying the site out of Condé Nast's control.

If the story line was short on evidence and possibly paranoid, it nonetheless tracked Huffman's psychic trajectory: The pure-hearted founder had come home to save his wayward corporate child. "It's kind of an egotistical thought," Huffman says, "but I felt like I'm literally the only person in the world who can fix this and I had a moral obligation to do so."

AS HE SAYS THIS, we are sitting in a conference room at Reddit's San Francisco headquarters, late on a Wednesday afternoon. Huffman has been back for only a month and is wearing the non-messianic uniform of a geek plutocrat: jeans, T-shirt, V-neck sweater, box-fresh red-striped Adidas, Pebble watch.

In San Francisco, Huffman has a close group of friends, drawn mainly from Y Combinator circles and including founders of Scribd and Twitch, with whom he rides motorcycles, belongs to a book club, takes swing-dancing lessons, and travels. This summer, that meant flying to Spain for a Twitch co-founder's bachelor party, where, according to another Twitch co-founder, Justin Kan, "he was dominating Ibiza's dance floor. He knows how to move that body." In August, Huffman attended his

The Worst of the Worst

Reddit has imposed varying levels of restrictions on its most vile sub-Reddits, using somewhat arbitrary distinctions. A sampling.

Banned

/r/TheFappening

Where nude photos of Jennifer Lawrence and other celebrities were posted. Banned because the photos had been stolen.

/r/jailbait

Hosted provocative photos of teenagers and was highlighted by Anderson Cooper on CNN.

/r/FatPeopleHate

Where nearly 150,000 members gathered to mock overweight people.

/r/Transfags

Encouraged transgender people to kill themselves.

/r/Rapingwomen

Rape fantasies and discussion threads encouraging sexual assault.

/r/GasTheKikes

A massive online Jew-hating community.

/r/Coontown

The most famous racist sub-Reddit, banned in August when Huffman announced that content cannot "exist solely to annoy other redditors, prevent us from improving Reddit, and generally make Reddit worse for everyone else."

Quarantined

Requires log-in through verified email.

/r/PicsofDeadKids

For sharing photos of dead children, not technically in violation of Reddit policy.

/r/SexwithDogs

Self-explanatory, containing video

and images.

Despite zoophilia being illegal in certain states, the forum has not been banned outright.

/r/TrayvonMartin

A racist-friendly forum that describes itself as focused on discussing "just the facts, as best we can discern," surrounding the 2012 shooting.

/r/KikeTown

Apparently less anti-Semitic than GasTheKikes.

Neither Banned nor Quarantined

/r/watchpeopledie

Images and video of scenarios ending in death.

/r/DateRape

Promising to help "pathetic virgin nerds on Reddit" have sex, this forum is full of derisive advice on meeting women ("talk slowly because they're dumb as shit").

/r/IFukMyDog

This "amateurs only" zoophilia forum is remarkably similar to SexWithDogs.

/r/candidfashion police

Consists entirely of photos of unsuspecting women's breasts and backsides paired with fashion criticism.

/r/daddyissues

Contains photos and videos of women in sexually suggestive positions and struggling with eating disorders.

fourth Burning Man, staying in Kan's camp Bao Chicka Wow Wow and helping to construct a gigantic iceberg-shaped art car called *Titanic's End*. "Steve helped a lot with building it," Kan says. "He's pretty handy."

Kan calls Huffman the most talented programmer he's known as well as the Reddit community personified. "Steve is the Ur-Redditor, the alpha Redditor. He's very socially liberal. He has a strong libertarian streak. And he's a total troll on the internet. He's the reason all of our friends have lock screens on our iPhones. Because if you left your iPhone out, he'd find your girlfriend or someone else important and figure out something to text them that would cause you a lot of grief. When I use Reddit, I see Steve in it."

Huffman first met Ohanian at the University of Virginia, where they were freshman-year hallmates and bonded over games of Gran Turismo 2 on Huffman's PlayStation. They lived together for the next four years, during which Huffman regularly pranked Ohanian. Once, he hacked Ohanian's political website, eyes-wide.org (Huffman: "It took itself way too seriously"), so that outgoing emails would appear to come from a prom-dress website. Shortly after graduating in 2005, they joined the first class of Y Combinator after brainstorming the idea for Reddit with the start-up incubator's founder, Paul Graham. An executive there, charmed by their boyish enthusiasm, called them "the muffins."

Reddit was an unexpected hit: Only 16 months after they founded it, Huffman and Ohanian sold the site to Condé Nast for a reported \$20 million, though a friend of Huffman's says it was closer to \$13 million. "At the time, we felt, *Oh, we're in over our heads, the economy's starting to tank, we're a little dysfunctional internally, so let's take the money while we can*," Huffman says. "We thought we were failing. Our traffic was doubling every couple months. We're like, *Oh, gosh, how long's this going to last?*"

Indefinitely, as it turned out. But even as Reddit continued its rapid expansion, Condé Nast, which had bought the site as part of an effort to grow its digital side, was retrenching in the face of the financial crisis. It never gave Reddit the resources it needed to keep pace with exploding traffic. Huffman and Ohanian stuck around for another three years before leaving. Huffman felt burned out, tired of waking up to 1,000 emails from angry Redditors in his in-box, tired of having just six employees, tired of having to constantly monitor the site even while on vacation, tired of internal dysfunction.



Ohanian and Huffman in 2005.

In recent years, Ohanian, who is six-feet and can sell from the stage, has become the public face of Reddit, and Huffman's contribution has been occluded, but it was Huffman who coded the site. "We used to joke about that," Huffman says. "I built Reddit, and Alexis made Reddit cool." Perhaps because of their friendship, they never precisely defined their roles. There was a long period when Ohanian was absent from the company so he could tend to his dying mother, and upon his return, Huffman was clearly the leader. "If you'd asked us who was in charge, and you had asked the employees of Reddit who was in charge, you'd have gotten different answers," Huffman says. Ohanian says he was surprised to find employees reporting to Huffman, "which made total sense but which I was too immature to realize."

Becoming business partners had taken a toll on their friendship. "You start a company with your best friend, there's always going to be a weird dynamic," Ohanian says. "The ability to disassociate business conflict and discussion from personal conflict and discussion, ten years ago, was very hard." At Reddit, Ohanian had been the nontechnical odd man out, surrounded by programmers who didn't always understand the importance of, say, schwag. One time, according to Chris Slowe, Reddit's first employee and now Hipmunk's chief scientist, "we're still treading water, and Alexis wanted to make plushies or action figures, and the two of them had a huge argument over, 'You're going to waste money on action figures?'"

Ohanian served as Huffman's best man at his 2009 wedding to a med student (they would later divorce), and together they invested in the Broadway musical *Billy*

Elliot. But the friends grew apart. Ohanian moved back to New York, where he developed his brand as an evangelist not just for Reddit but for online freedoms more generally. (*Forbes* crowned him "the Mayor of the Internet.") Huffman got his pilot's license, bought a 1995 Porsche, and spent the next several years building Hipmunk with cofounder Adam Goldstein and a handful of fellow ex-Redditors who shared their rage over existing travel websites.

Hipmunk brought a wry sensibility to the increasingly widgetized travel business (it rates flights on an "agony" index, a term that came from Huffman). It's done pretty well—last year, Hipmunk secured a \$20 million third round of venture-capital funding, and the site now employs around the same number of people as Reddit—but it never held Huffman's complete attention like Reddit did.

After leaving, Huffman found that he had a hard time letting go. He still had administrative access to the site and continued tinkering with its code. Once that access was cut off, he found a back door for another six months before finally being locked out. Even then, he remained an avid Reddit user, averaging an hour a day on the site and frequenting sub-Reddits like AskReddit and circlejerk (devoted to Reddit's most popular inside jokes). Besides ruing the decision to sell the company ("Obviously")—last year, giving the commencement speech at the Wakefield School, where he'd been senior-class president, his advice included "Don't sell too early"—he could see from the sidelines that the site just wasn't evolving fast enough. "I said that many times: 'What is going on over there? Get to work, get to work, hire, hire.'"

Recently, Huffman started thinking about his unresolved relationship baggage with Ohanian, which he describes as "a lot of wounds we never dealt with from the past." He brought it up with his therapist. "I was talking to him about how I miss having Alexis in my life," Huffman says. This past spring, he and Ohanian, over a few conversations involving steak and beers, "healed those things remarkably fast, in a matter of weeks."

ON HUFFMAN'S first day back at Reddit, he introduced himself to the community by doing an Ask Me Anything: "I am Steve Huffman, the new CEO of Reddit. AMA." To the quintessential Reddit question about whom he'd rather fight, 1,000 duck-size horses or one horse-size duck, Spez (Huffman's Reddit pseudonym) responded: "1,000 duck-sized horses. Since they can't climb stairs, you can easily get away from them long enough to figure out how to drown them."

Many of the AMA questions concerned how Huffman would deal with objectionable sub-Reddits. The company had never really settled on a way to handle them. In the site's early days, the leadership had been paternalistic: "If we saw something terribly racist, we just removed it and no one cared," recalls Jeremy Edberg, an early Reddit engineer who's now at Netflix. That became more difficult once the site allowed users to start their own sub-Reddits. In 2011, Condé Nast spun off Reddit into an independent holding of its parent company, Advance, and the next year Wong was hired as CEO. He took a hands-off approach and focused on growing the company. (Late last year, Reddit raised \$50 million, at a valuation of \$500 million.) Then he left because Reddit's board refused to move the offices closer to his home. When Pao took his place, she tried to shift to a policy distinguishing overt harassment from simple vileness. But at the same time, Ohanian was defending Reddit as "a bastion of free speech on the World Wide Web," and whenever a sub-Reddit received even a threat of banishment, a great hue and cry would arise among Reddit's most vocal power-users. It took a toll on staff morale and also made recruiting harder. Who would want to work at a company taken hostage by its most repugnant users?

Chris Slowe likens Huffman's return to Reddit to Steve Jobs's return to Apple. The analogy is grandiose, but Slowe points out that the original departure of Reddit's founders had left the site without an institutional grasp of the ad hoc reasons



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many policies had been created. “Things that should be treated as case law started getting turned into the Constitution,” Slowe says. It was Huffman, and maybe only Huffman, who could divorce the site from its worst elements. “The Reddit job comes with a lot of baggage,” Huffman says, “but I think it’s easier for me, because I’m a founder, to say, ‘Screw you guys, this is how I’ve always wanted it to be.’” He decided that the toxic sub-Redditors, which he says are only .02 percent of the site’s users, were not free-speech martyrs but just “assholes trying to ruin Reddit.” And so he banned them.

Specifically, he subjected a handful of sub-Reddits to an outright ban and introduced a quarantine system under which broadly offensive sub-Reddits would only be viewable by opt-in subscribers, who would need to sign up for them using an email address.

Unsurprisingly, the .02 percent were incensed. On the site, Huffman has been labeled an “inhuman shitstain” and “racist chucklefuck,” and a new sub-Reddit called Raping Spez was created. A number of those affected by his new content policy, including moderators of Coontown and Philosophy of Rape, decamped to a new site called Voat, claiming Reddit was on the brink of a mass evacuation. A user who goes by the name GreatApeNiggy, who described himself to me as “just a guy that clicked the create button and made Coontown a reality,” told me that the ban will “slow down the spread of truth.” He thinks Huffman “will continue taking out sub-Reddit after sub-Reddit until Reddit is nothing but an extremist liberal hugbox and the average person moves on to something else.” Even moderators of less objectionable content were angry about Huffman’s sudden retreat from being a bastion of free speech. “They can dance around the semantics of ‘That’s not why they created it.’ But the reality is, not long after it came into existence, that’s exactly what it became,” says Daniel Allen, founder of the popular forum Crappy Design. “Not that I agree that there should be sub-Reddits about beating women and racism—those are all distasteful—but you don’t see the government shutting down the KKK and the Westboro Baptist Church.” Allen and some other moderators are convinced the decisions were made to make the site more corporate friendly. “The frustration comes from them saying one thing and doing another.”

For now, though, the ban appears to be working—there hasn’t been another big flap over terrible behavior, and the site is still attracting more users. Huffman says his focus is to repair the relationship with

moderators and build out Reddit’s infrastructure. “For better or for worse,” he says, “Reddit is very similar to the way it was back then.” He plans to at least double the “comically understaffed” site over the next year, and to pluck the abundant “low-hanging fruit,” like creating a proper Reddit-branded mobile app and redesigning the desktop homepage, which is still a schizoid jumble. Two of Huffman’s great interests are motorcycles and ballroom dance—while undergrads at UVA, he and his sister Amanda entered intercollegiate competitions as partners—but he says that not only does he not subscribe to sub-Reddits about them, he isn’t sure whether such sub-Reddits exist. (They do.) Huffman knows this is a problem. “Reddit has this incredible breadth that most people aren’t even aware exists, and even if they are, like me, it still hasn’t even occurred to me to find some of those.”

He also professes not to be nearly as daunted as most outsiders by the eventual need to deliver the company’s investors a profit. Given Reddit’s sheer size, “we could monetize with half the efficiency of one of our competitors and make oodles more money than we’re doing now,” he says. Even in the face of user anonymity, advertisers can still do click-tracking, and the list of an individual user’s idiosyncratic sub-Reddit subscriptions is nothing if not a precise psychographic profile of his interests. It’s not hard to imagine Reddit doing a lot more with native ads, which it has been experimenting with since 2009.

Huffman says that mere advertising is “the most naïve” way to make money: “There are a thousand ways of making money on Reddit that are far, far more interesting.” He suggests, for instance, that future revenues could lie in positioning Reddit as a fee-based middleman for transactions already taking place on the site and in selling data to celebrities and brands. “Wouldn’t they love to know what’s being

“The Reddit job comes with a lot of baggage, but it’s easier for me, because I’m a founder, to say, ‘Screw you guys.’”

said about them on Reddit? Certainly, they pay a shit-ton of money to Twitter for that, and you only get 140 characters at a time.”

In the short term, Reddit’s boldest effort to grow may lie in a project, overseen by Ohanian, called Amplify. The idea is to surface, curate, and publicize Reddit’s best content, which for years has been lucratively pillaged by the likes of BuzzFeed. Ohanian has led the launch of a weekly podcast called Upvoted and an email newsletter called Upvoted Weekly, both of which focus on the most popular Reddit content. (Reddit has already launched a site within the site, also called Upvoted.) Ohanian also wants to change the way celebrities interact with Reddit, so that, instead of it being one more stop on a publicity tour, it becomes a platform where they feel they have to maintain a continuous presence, the same way they have to be on Twitter and Instagram. “Reddit’s already very, very large,” Huffman says. “I think we can be ten times larger.”

Huffman needs to be right. He is no longer a significant owner of the company, and though Advance treats Reddit as a passive investment, he now reports to a board with high expectations. If he is looking for any reminder of the vagaries of growth on the internet, he gets one daily, walking past the hand-drawn “Map of Online Communities” in 2007 that hangs along a corridor in Reddit’s offices. MySpace is a giant land-mass, Friendster and Xanga respectably large nation-states, Facebook a middling duchy no larger than the adjacent LiveJournal. Twitter isn’t even on the map, and Reddit is a speck, overshadowed by considerably larger Digg. Only a few years later, Reddit would eclipse Digg, in part thanks to an event known as the Great Digg Migration, when Diggers alienated by a sudden and unwelcome redesign left en masse for Reddit.

Huffman insists he’s not worried about a Great Reddit Migration, now that Voat is holding itself out as a truly uncensored alternative. “Voat is just a copy of Reddit,” he says. “I wish them the best. I know their subscriber numbers are totally bogus, that’s obvious to me. We used to fake those numbers, too, when we were little, so I can’t blame them for that.”

Spoken with the blithe confidence of a chief executive. But Reddit wore on Huffman the last time around, and though he may have forgotten this during the excitement surrounding his return, the anxiety has returned. “To say he has thick skin—absolutely not,” says Adrienne Plaskett, his girlfriend, noting that, since returning to Reddit, Huffman has vomited from stress several times. ■

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THE CUT



Leta Sobierajski
DESIGNER

Coat: J.Crew stadium-cloth cocoon coat, \$350, with J.Crew faux-fur scarf, \$150, at jcrew.com.

Eyes: Make Up for Ever Flash Color in acid green.

Lips: Nars sheer lipstick in Dolce Vita.

BRIGHT COATS FOR COLD DAYS

Six New York women in winter's least-boring outerwear.

Photographs by **BOBBY DOHERTY**

Styling by Rebecca Ramsey



Helen Holmes
WRITER

Coat: Versace alpaca-fur long coat, price upon request at 647 Fifth Ave., at 53rd St.; 212-317-0224.

Eyes: Make Up for Ever Flash Color in turquoise.

Lips: Nars velvet matte lip pencil in Pop Life.

Nicole Bridgeford
MAKEUP ARTIST

Coat: No. 21 wool-mohair
oversize coat, \$2,500
at numeroventuno.com.

Eyes: Nars multiple
in Copacabana.

Lips: Nars velvet matte
lip pencil in Cruella.





Delia Liu
PRODUCER

Coat: *Louis Vuitton*
mohair knit coat, \$3,850
at 1 E. 57th St., nr. Fifth
Ave.; 212-758-8877.

Eyes: *Nars multiple*
in *Maldives*.

Lips: *Make Up for Ever*
Flash Color in black.



Keisha Regular
OFFICE MANAGER

Coat: Bottega Veneta multicolor
pois-print wool coat,
\$4,950 at 699 Fifth Ave.,
nr. 54th St.; 212-371-6511.

Lips: Nars velvet matte
lip pencil in Dragon Girl.



Anna Pierce
JEWELER

Coat: *Topshop pink teddy coat, \$210 at 608 Fifth Ave., nr. 48th St.; 212-757-8240.*

Eyes: *Make Up for Ever Flash Color in yellow.*

Lips: *Nars lipstick in Toled.*

Hair by Martin-Christopher Harper
@ Platform|nyc.
Makeup by Allie Smith.



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..... THE BREAKFAST BOOM
..... AN GUN

GLOBAL DESIGN
FALL 2015

**Pieds-à-
Terre**

By Wendy
Goodman
p. 78

PHOTOGRAPH BY HELENA ÖKVIST

FOR NEW YORKERS LUCKY ENOUGH to have second (or third) homes in other cities and their environs—for doing business, visiting family, or just escaping winter—these residences afford an opportunity to have a little experimental fun when it comes to design. Take, for instance, designer Laura Kirar, who built a pink pool house (shown here) on the grounds of a crumbling 19th-century former sisal factory, or Luca Andrisani, who decided to plaster pretty much his entire Miami apartment in floor-to-wall-to-terrace blue tile.

BEST BETS

CLUSTER

Two mattress start-ups—the one-model-only Casper and high-tech Wright—join South Soho's Sleep District.

Savoir Beds: Hand-tufted with hand-teased horsehair (54 Greene St.).

Casper showroom: Three layers of latex, memory, and support foams (45 Bond St.).

Wright: Five layers of viscoelastic memory foam with side vents (188 Lafayette St.).

Keetsa: Ecofriendly with green-tea-embedded foam (69 Mercer St.).

CoCo-Mat: Metal-free with flexible rubber for pull-out couches (49 Mercer St.).

Hästens: \$112,000 beds with horsetail hair (75 Grand St.).

Airweave: Mattress toppers with entwined-resin fibers (498 Broome St.).



2x2

Abstract side tables

A little neoplasticism for the entryway.

UNDER \$300

OVER \$300

WOOD



Contrast table, \$276 at rossanaorlandi.com.



Laurel side table, \$1,115 at the Future Perfect (55 Great Jones St.).

METAL



Slit table, \$166 at hayminimarket.com.



Alwa, from \$2,480 at Avenue Road (145 W. 28th St.).

ASK A SHOP CLERK

Desiree Verdejo left her law career to open one of Harlem's first high-end cosmetics stores, **Vivrant Beauty** (220 Saint Nicholas Ave.).

Why the switch? Over the past few years, I've watched Harlem's vacant lots become fancy restaurants, but I still had the same problem I always did growing up in this neighborhood with an acne-prone complexion: no skin-care shops to help me find masks and washes for my individual needs. Now, my salesperson is a certified aesthetician and I handpick brands like Flo + Theo, a local vegan line by two Nigerian sisters, and carry foundation that comes in the full color range, from porcelain to deep brown.

TOP FIVE

Yazid Aksas's Public Factory is a co-retailing space for 12 brands (310 W. Broadway).



"St. Frank is the only home-goods brand here because the products are fair trade, like this **skull made by an artisan in Mexico** (\$225)."



"I designed this **Aksel shirt** (\$135) with a double stitching that molds to the contours of a man's body."



"I'd use this **Enter backpack** (\$169) for groceries because it has so many inside pockets."



"Instead of an hour hand, the whole face of this **Orikami clock** (\$115) spins."



"This **Elkel jacket** (\$469) is unisex. And it's for going out."

UPSTAIRS

Alan Maleh just opened a physical space for his magazine-cum-e-tailer **Man of the World** on the second floor of his other menswear shop, **Gentry** (108 N. 7th St., Williamsburg).

"We signed a lease for the apartment above Gentry that we decided to integrate into the store. Downstairs is for the younger, edgier, Japanese-inspired man, but when you walk upstairs, the lifestyle changes. It's for the James Bond-meets-Paul Newman tailored gentleman who travels with a leather **Globe-Trotter carry-on bag** (\$1,835) and wears a **Native American thunderbird cuff** (\$360). Upstairs, everything is for sale, including the **vintage Nigerian hand-beaded chairs** (\$5,000

each), and there will be someone who represents our **\$15,000-per-year concierge service** to book your plane, hotel, restaurant reservations, and cultural events when you travel. We say Man of the World is everything a man needs and nothing he doesn't."



TREND SPAWNING

A distressed-metal motif reminiscent of the Statue of Liberty is the new sheen in town.



1929: Midtown's **Mercantile Building** is finished with a tarnished-copper rooftop.



MAY 2014: Inspired by the building's green roof, Mary Wallis unveils her **Acorn lamp** at ICFE.



MAY 2014: Also at ICFE, Rich Brilliant Willing's oxidized-copper **Palindrome** chandelier debuts.



FEBRUARY 2015: Danish brand & tradition commissions **oxidized vases** from Dutch designer Lex Pott.



MAY 2015: Johnson Trading Gallery shows **chairs** from South Korea's Kwangho Lee.



AUGUST 2015: Brooklyn design duo Cofield release **patinated bottle openers** and **clocks**.



SEPTEMBER 2015: Brooklyn's Uhuru Design launches **fine jewelry**, all in distressed metal.

THE LOOK BOOK

MARY WIKLER,
Retired

What did you retire from?

Well, I had a very checkered career: I moved to New York from New Jersey when I was 18 and worked as a secretary for the BBC. I had a mad crush on Alistair Cooke! I thought I wanted to be a model, so I went to meet with Eileen Ford, who ended up hiring me as her secretary—she fired me after two years because she said I was too slow. So I started my own agency—we represented Twiggy—but went off to be assistant to the actor Yul Brynner, who was dating my roommate at the time. I went on tour with him when we was starring in *Home Sweet Homer*—it's on the wall of Joe Allen's, because when it opened on Broadway it closed the same night. When I married my late husband, who was a doctor, I ended up as an administrator for the department of psychiatry at NYU Bellevue.

Working with models versus working with psychiatrists?

Basically the same thing.

INTERVIEW BY
ALEXIS SWERDLOFF



LIGHTNING ROUND

Neighborhood:

Kips Bay. Hometown: Ridgewood, New Jersey.

First apartment:

"I paid \$100 a month for a studio on Jane Street."

Hat: From Las Vegas.

"I bought it in 1976."

Favorite mystery writers:

Michael Connelly, Ian Rankin.

TV shows:

Ray Donovan, Homeland, English mysteries on PBS, Empire: "I'm so happy Empire's back; it's so outrageous."



The Tuscan Gun

THE UNDERGROUND GOURMET

The F Train to Fiesole

The Tuscan Gun takes a refreshingly low-key approach to celebrity chefdom.

BY ROBIN RAISFELD AND ROB PATRONITE

YOU CAN REST ASSURED that the trio of giddy gals occupying the center table at the Tuscan Gun one recent Friday night didn't road-trip in from South Jersey just for a plate of crostini. No, they made the pilgrimage to Windsor Terrace to ogle and pose for selfies with one Gabriele Corcos, the lanky, ebullient, Italian-accented Cooking Channel chef who was hosting the meal. The Tuscan Gun, Corcos would have you know, is not a restaurant but rather, as the storefront window proclaims, OFFICINE and ALIMENTARI. This translates roughly to "workshop" and "grocery," but the establishment is closer in practice to a café-slash-supper-club-slash-brand-expansion, because these days, any self-respecting small-screen culinary personality needs a physical home base in which to test recipes and sell autographed cookbooks.

Since it appeared in May on a quiet residential block (Corcos's own, in fact), the Tuscan Gun has had a dual identity: espresso bar and sandwich shop by day, occasional pop-up Tuscan kitchen by night. This schedule has allowed Corcos and his wife, the actress Debi Mazar, to travel the country filming their show, *Extra Virgin*, between

dinner engagements. Prix-fixe suppers are announced and ticketed online, attracting fans from the tristate area for intimate communal meals with running commentary from the affable host. The vibe is laid-back. The service is friendly and informal. And the food is simple, rustic, and classically Tuscan—a loving tribute to Corcos's Fiesole family home and the hunters, farmers, and fishermen whose memory inspires his menus and TV show. In a word, Guy Fieri's American Kitchen & Bar this is not.

There's nothing groundbreaking about the day or night menu, but each has its charms. A Windsor

Terracean out for a morning stroll could do worse than to stumble into the place for a coffee and a pancetta-Parmesan scone. Come lunchtime, the counter crew will rightly recommend something involving porchetta-style pork shoulder—either an herb focaccia stuffed with morsels of the beer-braised meat or a bowl of pasta sauced with its rendered fat and dusted with Pecorino cheese. The pressed mortadella sandwich likewise hits the spot, and if one criticism can be made of the deftly dressed pastas, it's that the kitchen relies on penne rigate as if it had forgotten that Italy has more shapes of pasta than Eskimos have

words for snow. The classic pasta e fagioli, though, is beyond reproach, and the best reason yet not to regret summer's end.

Unlike breakfast and lunch, the Tuscan Gun pop-up dinner has a familial spirit and a heartier menu. Each series is loosely themed, and the latest was "A Super Tuscan September": a five-course feast served over two and a half hours and punctuated by Corcos's dish-description interludes. So we learn that the chicken-liver crostino, bright with lemon zest, is his grandmother's recipe; that the lush mushroom soup gets its texture from potato, not cream; that the rabbit ragù lapping fresh pappardelle requires the meat to be painstakingly plucked from tiny bones; and that Italians aren't fond of white-meat chicken, which will never cook up as tender as his succulent cacciatora. As at any casual dinner party, you might find yourself waiting for a spoon, or the next course, while the host hustles around the stove. But invariably, wine is shared, strangers become friends, groupies are charmed, and you're transported—if not all the way to Tuscany, then to a little homespun sliver of it just off Prospect Park.

☆☆☆
The Tuscan Gun
199 Windsor Pl.,
nr. John P.
Devaney Blvd.,
Windsor Terrace;
347-987-3166
thetuscangun.com

SCRATCHPAD

One star for the simple, satisfying daytime menu and two more for the periodic prix-fixe dinners.

BITES

IDEAL MEAL: At lunch, pasta e fagioli and a mortadella sandwich, or pasta with porchetta sauce; set dinner menu changes. **NOTE:** Now that the wine license has arrived, there's a \$25 corkage fee (one-bottle limit). **OPEN:** Daily for breakfast and lunch. The dinner schedule is announced on the website. **PRICES:** Lunch, \$4.50 to \$7.50; dinners, \$95 to \$150.

"U.G." STAR SYSTEM: ★★★★★ THE CATEGORICAL BEST; ★★★★ EXCELLENT; ★★★ GENERALLY DELICIOUS; ★★ VERY GOOD; ★ NOTEWORTHY

4:25 PM

Who would have thought the Oysterpocalypse
would be such an elegant affair?

Host Beautifully



OPENINGS

Le Garage

159B Central Ave., entrance on Suydam St., Bushwick; no phone yet

YOU MIGHT SAY that Rachel Allswang has been postponing the inevitable. She grew up in her mother Catherine's restaurants in San Francisco and Paris, before trying her hand at interior design in New York. Now mother and daughter have combined their talents to open this 60-seat space encompassing four renovated lots—one that was formerly used to raise pigeons. No squabs on the menu here, just some of Catherine's modern bistro dishes like duck-fat potatoes with béarnaise and glazed flounder with sorrel jus, pictured. Rachel, who designed the restaurant, heads the front of the house, but mom still rules the kitchen.



Hard Times Sundaes Truck

Flatbush Ave. at Lincoln Rd., Prospect-Lefferts Gardens; no phone

MILL BASIN'S LOSS is Prospect-Lefferts Gardens's gain: Burger maestro Andrew Zurica has relocated his Hard Times Sundaes truck from the Kings Plaza Shopping Center parking lot to a triangular patch at the intersection of Flatbush Avenue, Washington Avenue, and Lincoln Road, a corner that will soon be perfumed with the scent of triple cheeseburgers, bacon-wrapped chili dogs, and crispy fries. His new home is convenient to both the B and Q lines (Prospect Park station) and a handy beer distributor just across the street. Coming soon: Zurica's brand-new breakfast sandwich on a classic kaiser roll.

R.R. & R.P.



THE DISH

Vegan Cold Pizza Salad

Brooks Headley named his East Village canteen for the star meat-free burger, but some of the most exciting things to emerge from his kitchen are vegetable improves that may materialize mid-meal, their names scribbled on notes taped to the wall. The new vegan cold pizza salad (neither pizza nor salad, in fact) is a recent example, one born of kitchen happenstance, as these things often are. Headley's crew had mislaid a batch of chopped tomatoes destined for the creamed corn, and were pleased to discover that, when slow-cooked with black pepper, garlic, olive oil, and fennel seed, they came to smell and taste like pepperoni or Italian sausage. With some canny contrasts of flavor and texture—griddled nut cheese, crushed bread sticks, bushels of basil—Headley has managed to conjure a slice of pizza in the form of a juicy, crunchy, "cheesy" vegan side. R.R. & R.P.

As a special at
Superiority Burger;
\$5; 430 E. 9th St.,
n.r. Ave. A;
212-256-1192.



Headley uses an "almost excessive amount" of bruised basil—"like when you get the basket of herbs at a good Thai place."

He borrowed the recipe for his Marcona-almond "ricotta" from Del Posto's vegan menu.

Quick-pickled banana peppers are key. "I don't shy away from acid and spice," says the chef.

Addeo Bakery's lumpen, misshaped bread sticks are worth a trip to the Bronx. Headley oils, salts, and toasts them for extra crunch.

The slow-roasted tomatoes are more Grandma's garden than exotic heirloom: "I go for the cheapest red tomatoes I can find at the market."

PHOTOGRAPHS: KATHRYN PALMIER/NEW YORK MAGAZINE (LE GARAGE); BOBBY DOHERTY/NEW YORK MAGAZINE (HARD TIMES SUNDAES)

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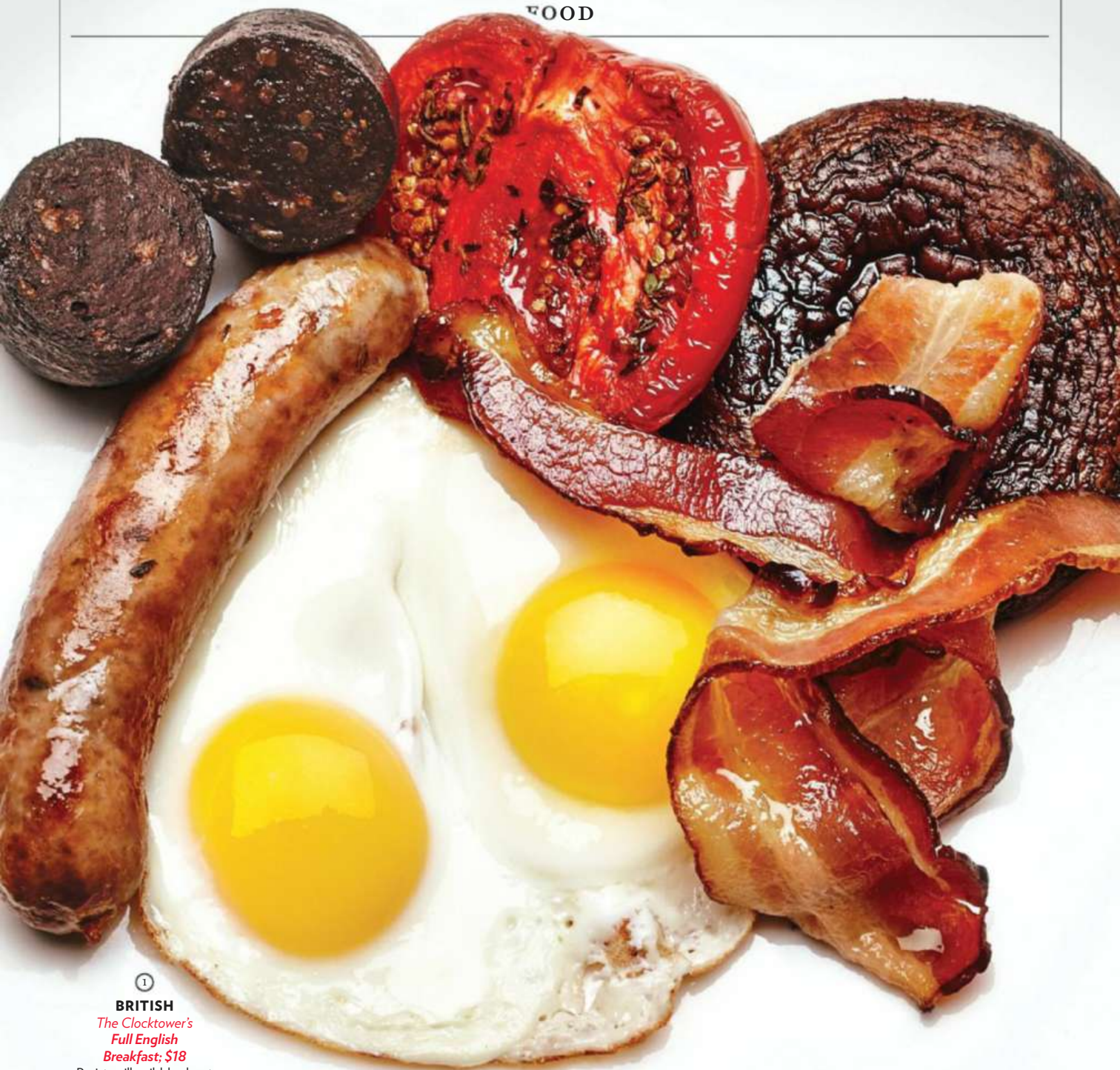
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①

BRITISH

*The Clocktower's
Full English
Breakfast; \$18*

Purists will quibble about the toast not being fried and the absence of the requisite mess of baked beans, but if you're looking for a quick morning fix of two sunny-side-up eggs, sausage, a roasted tomato, mushrooms, and a knob of ye olde blood pudding, chef Jason Atherton's elegantly composed dish will do just fine. 5 Madison Ave., nr. 24th St.; 212-413-4300.

GUIDE

Eggs in Translation

Our critic woke up extra early to sniff out the best new morning meals, which, thanks to a variety of factors—food-conscious hotels, breakfast-loving chefs, the mini SoCal-style-restaurant boomlet—are as deliciously eclectic as anything you'll find at lunch or dinner.

BY ADAM PLATT



GILDA design carlo mollino 1954 | quickship



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3



4



7



6



5



2

ITALIAN

Santina's
Eggs a Piacere; \$15
The key element here is the spicy potatoes, which are dipped in a mix of tomato and chiles and refried for an extra crunch. If you're feeling rash, call for a bowl of the great house guanciale e pepe rice (\$18) and slide the perfectly poached eggs on top.
820 Washington St., at Gansevoort St.; 212-254-3000.

3

HUNGRYMAN

Pies 'n' Thighs' Rob Evans on a Biscuit; \$10
We love the buttermilk biscuit (as thick and sturdy as a small toaster) and the scrambled eggs (streaked with melted American cheese), but finish the entire creamy, rosemary-rich smothering of sausage gravy and you won't need to eat much else for the rest of the week.
43 Canal St., nr. Ludlow St.; 212-431-7437.

4

ALL-DAY

El Rey Coffee Bar & Luncheonette's
Avocado del Sur (with flatbread and two poached eggs); \$12.50
We're as weary as you are of all the avocado hype, but the most popular dish at this popular Lower East Side-meets-Malibu establishment works as a comforting breakfast, a healthful lunch, or a pick-me-up afternoon snack.
100 Stanton St., nr. Ludlow St.; 212-260-3950.

5

CAL-MEX

Dimes'
Summer Tacos; \$8
This fluffy (the scrambled eggs), faintly spicy (the mango salsa and hot sauce), West Coast (the inevitable avocado) breakfast delicacy comes two to a plate at this popular little Canal Street operation, which is a good thing, because it's more or less impossible to eat just one.
49 Canal St., nr. Ludlow St.; 212-925-1300.

6

NOSHER STYLE

Baz Bagel & Restaurant's
Bunny Breakfast; \$12
The entire Jewish-appetizing canon is available at this modest Little Italy diner, but if you've been gorging on breakfasts for a week, the one we recommend is the Bunny: two sunny-side eggs, a toasted bagel (made in-house), Nova salmon, with a few healthy slices of avocado on the side.
181 Grand St., nr. Mulberry St.; 212-335-0609.

7

JAPANESE

Okonomi's
Ichiju Sansai; \$15 to \$21
The set breakfast at this little Williamsburg ramen shop looks like it's been beamed in from one of the more elegant ryokans of Kyoto. At about \$20 for your omelette cube, miso soup, pickles, rice, and choice of expertly roasted fish, it's also roughly four times less expensive.
150 Ainslie St., nr. Lorimer St., Williamsburg; 718-302-0598.



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WHEN NEW YORK WINTERS BECOME
UNBEARABLE, THIS UPPER EAST SIDE
COUPLE FLEES TO SANTA MONICA.

Photographs by Annie Schlechter



2015

GLOBAL DESIGN

PIEDS-À-TERRE AROUND THE WORLD

A tour of New Yorkers' homes far outside of New York.

BY WENDY GOODMAN

THE KITCHEN AND DINING ROOM

Decorator Jessica Ayromloo sourced the wood for the kitchen bar from E&K Vintage Wood and banded the edges in stainless steel. The Pierre Paulin bar stools were upholstered in neon-yellow vinyl. The chandelier over the dining table is made of vintage speakers.



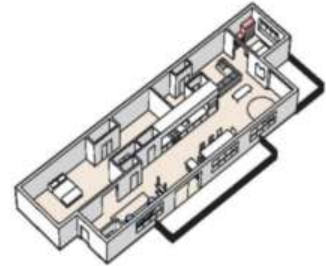
THE GUEST BEDROOM

Ayromloo installed wall-mounted lighting fixtures by onefortythree to free up space on the nightstands. The print is by artist Mateo Tannatt, and the cherry wallpaper is by Flavor Paper.



THE FOYER

Curtains made of plumbing pipe let the sun creep in.



WHEN INTERIOR DECORATOR Jessica Ayromloo's clients, a Manhattan couple with a duplex on the Upper East Side, first visited this Santa Monica loft one block from the beach, it was hard for them to get beyond the stuffy décor. "There were overbearing, floor-to-ceiling drapes everywhere. And so much beige," Ayromloo says. The owners, who come to L.A. about once every six weeks or so, were going for an industrial, youthful vibe. So Ayromloo commissioned local artists to make installations out of perforated metal and a kitchen island of reclaimed wood. "Because we hired people in the neighborhood, the owners were actually able to meet every person behind their artwork and custom pieces," Ayromloo says. She installed neon lights for the kitchen and a chandelier made of discarded speakers, and kept the exposed metal piping in the ceilings to create an industrial feel. "Yes, everything feels graphic and cool, but the space is comfortable at heart," Ayromloo explains. "The couple's grandkids needed to be able to run across the dining-room banquette. Nothing is too precious."

MAURA KUTNER WALTERS

THE LIVING ROOM

Ayromloo and the owners found these Caterpillar chairs by Quillan in West Hollywood on a shopping trip. The bicycle seat, by the Castiglioni Brothers, is a nod to nearby Venice Beach. The Cappellini floor lamp is made of handblown glass. "A round coffee table felt too expected on a round rug," Ayromloo says, "so we broke it up with three small tables to maintain some informality."



GLOBAL **2** DESIGN

A Little Flat in Bogotá

FOR WHEN INTERIOR DESIGNER JUAN MONTOYA POPS IN FOR A FAMILY VISIT.

(AS FOR HIS PARIS PLACE, SEE PAGE 86.)

MOSTLY NEW YORK-BASED interior designer Juan Montoya, who calls a one-bedroom near the Morgan Library home, realized he needed his own apartment in Bogotá back in the 1980s. On his return trips home to the Colombian capital, he says, “I decided to buy an apartment to be independent from the family but close enough to visit them frequently.” He found a new building still under construction in the high-up Rosales neighborhood, coveted for its views. As it was still being built, he was able to halt some of the finishing touches—for instance, he asked the contractor to leave the walls without their final coat of paint, then he whitewashed them to create a raw and



THE VIEW

The daybed in the living room is a perfect perch from which to watch Bogotá down below.





↑
THE LIVING ROOM

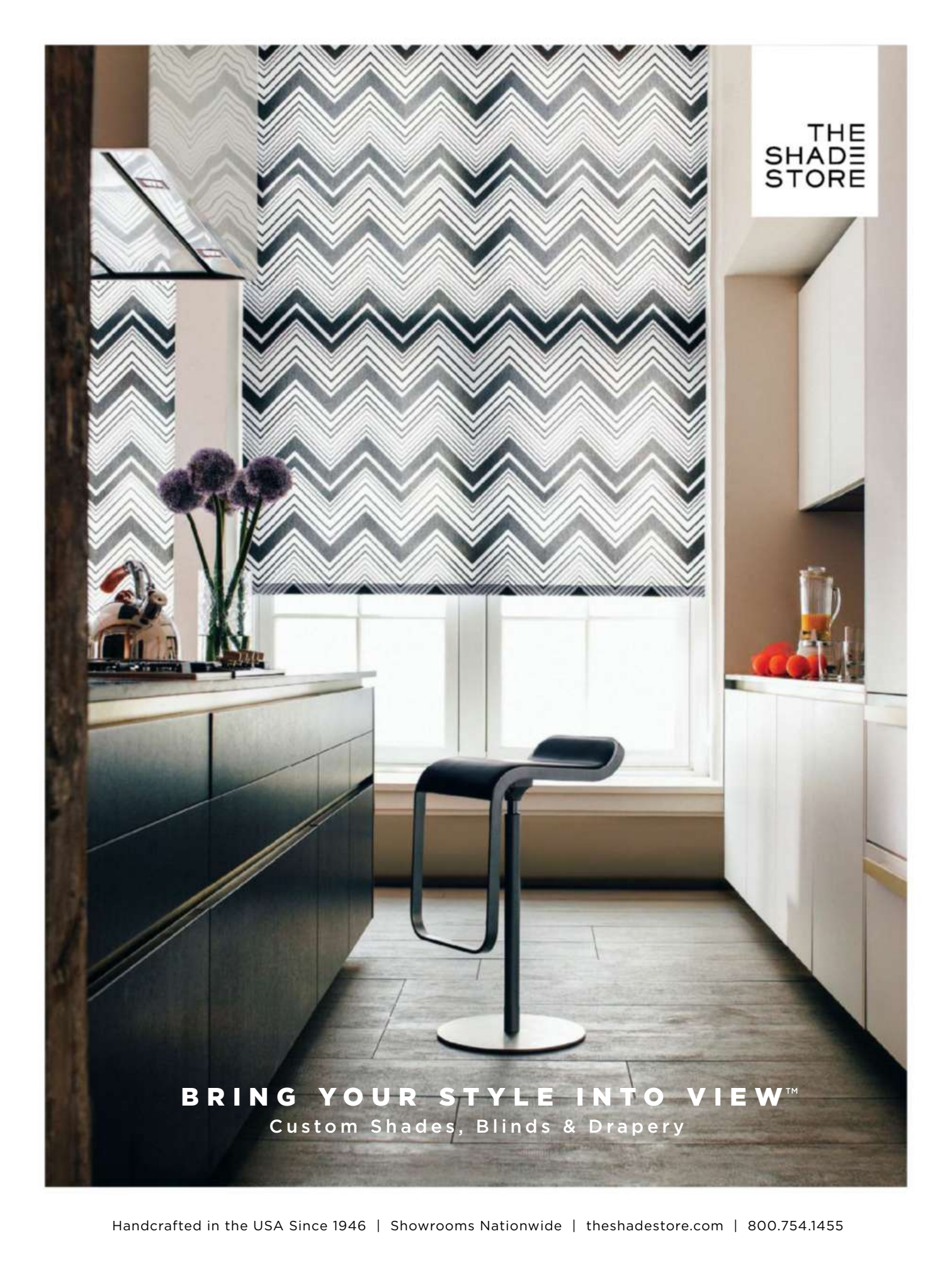
The walls and fireplace add varying textures to the space. The rough limestone mantel and surround are made of the same stone used on Colombian farms.



←
The 17th-century painting leaning against the wall in a gilded frame is attributed to the artist Figueroa.

uneven texture. The apartment has the warmth of a traditional Colombian home with layered textiles and pre-Colonial artifacts (“like my grandmother’s house, which was full of antiques, full of history”). The traditional pieces are paired with a Regency daybed and a 19th-century Italian chair in gold. “The first thing I do when I arrive in Bogotá,” he says, “is send over a menu of what I would like to eat at my mother’s house. Her cook will make the most wonderful ajiaco, a kind of chicken soup.” He visits about twice a year and is always tinkering with the design: “I like to move, do, add, and subtract, but mainly subtract and edit.”

W.G.



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GLOBAL **3** DESIGN

...And His Other Little Flat, in Paris

WHEN MONTTOYA'S NOT IN BOGOTÁ.
(SEE PAGE 82.)

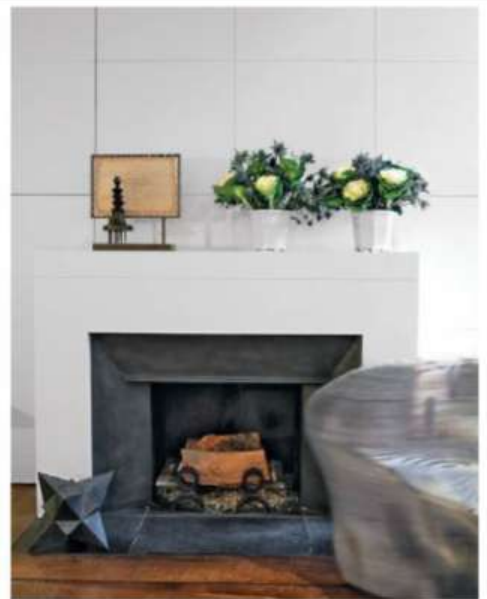
MONTTOYA WAS on his way to Charles de Gaulle when “a good friend called me up to say he had found ‘a jewel of an apartment.’” He agreed to stop in for a five-minute look. Despite the fact that the Rue Jacob apartment, in the Sixth Arrondissement, was “completely destroyed, and all chopped up into little rooms that didn’t make sense,” he was taken with its 14-foot ceilings and two “wonderful doors” that open onto a terrace. “I was able to analyze the space, make sense of it, and said, ‘I’ll buy it.’” He realized it was a good idea for



THE LIVING ROOM

A painting by Takesuda Matsutani hangs above an India Mahdavi sofa. The slate coffee table and the sharkskin cabinet between the windows were both designed by Montoya. The curtain fabric is by Dedar.





THE MANTELPIECE

The aluminum Slice chair by Mathias Bengtsson was bought at Barry Friedman.



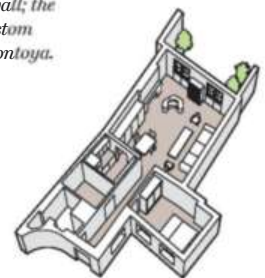
THE HALLWAY

The floor is 18th-century recycled wood. The white-plaster light fixtures are by Mamuela Zervudachi.



THE KITCHEN AND BATHROOM

The kitchen has a blackboard wall; the sink was custom designed by Montoya.



him to have a place in Paris, as he has so many clients in Europe, and it's a convenient stopover for trips to Sweden, where he and his partner, Urban Karlsson, go during the holidays to visit Karlsson's family. (Montoya ends up staying here four or five times a year.) He's since transformed it into a livable one-bedroom, restoring the original 18th-century wood beams in the living room and adding a wood-paneled galley kitchen. Montoya puts it simply: "The Bogotá apartment reflects Bogotá, and the Paris apartment reflects Paris." **W.G.**



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GLOBAL **4** DESIGN

Positano in Miami

ARCHITECT LUCA ANDRISANI COVERED
HIS NORTH MIAMI BEACH
APARTMENT—INSIDE AND OUT—WITH
GIO PONTI TILE TO MATCH
THE OCEAN.

THE TERRACE

When Andrisani first saw the space, he thought to himself, "Oh, this is pretty." But when I saw the view, I was like, "Oh my God. Forget it. It's amazing." The terrace is laid with the same tile found inside. The table and chairs, by Maurizio Tempestini, were bought at auction.



BEING MY OWN CLIENT was very strange,” New York architect Luca Andrisani says. “So I really went crazy with the concept—because I was able to.” That concept, for his loftlike North Miami Beach getaway, which he tries to visit monthly, was ’60s Italian design (“I’m reconnecting to my roots,” says Andrisani, a native Italian), and the craziness comes in via the Vietri tile, designed by Gio Ponti. The tile is everywhere, both in the apartment and on the terrace. “I went with it,” says Andrisani, who lives in a mostly cream-and-brown-hued Hell’s Kitchen apartment. “I still think of it as a minimalist approach, because I just used one material.” The rooms pick up the blues of Ponti’s design, in the window treatments, the kitchen cabinetry, and the upholstery throughout. “Ponti specifically matched this tile to the water,” says Andrisani. “That’s why it was ideal. When you step in this, it’s the blue of the ocean.” The ocean features prominently in the apartment: “The way the space is structured,” says Andrisani, who created the open plan, “wherever you are, even if you are in the bathroom, you can see the water.”

RUMAAN ALAM



THE BEDROOM

The rosewood bed was custom-made by Midcentury LA. The ’50s Murano chandelier was purchased at auction.



THE DINING ROOM

The sideboard is by Osvaldo Borsani and the lamps by Barovier & Toso; both date from the ’60s, as does the Moretti glassware inside.



PHOTOGRAPHS: EMILIO COLLAVINO

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THE BATHROOM

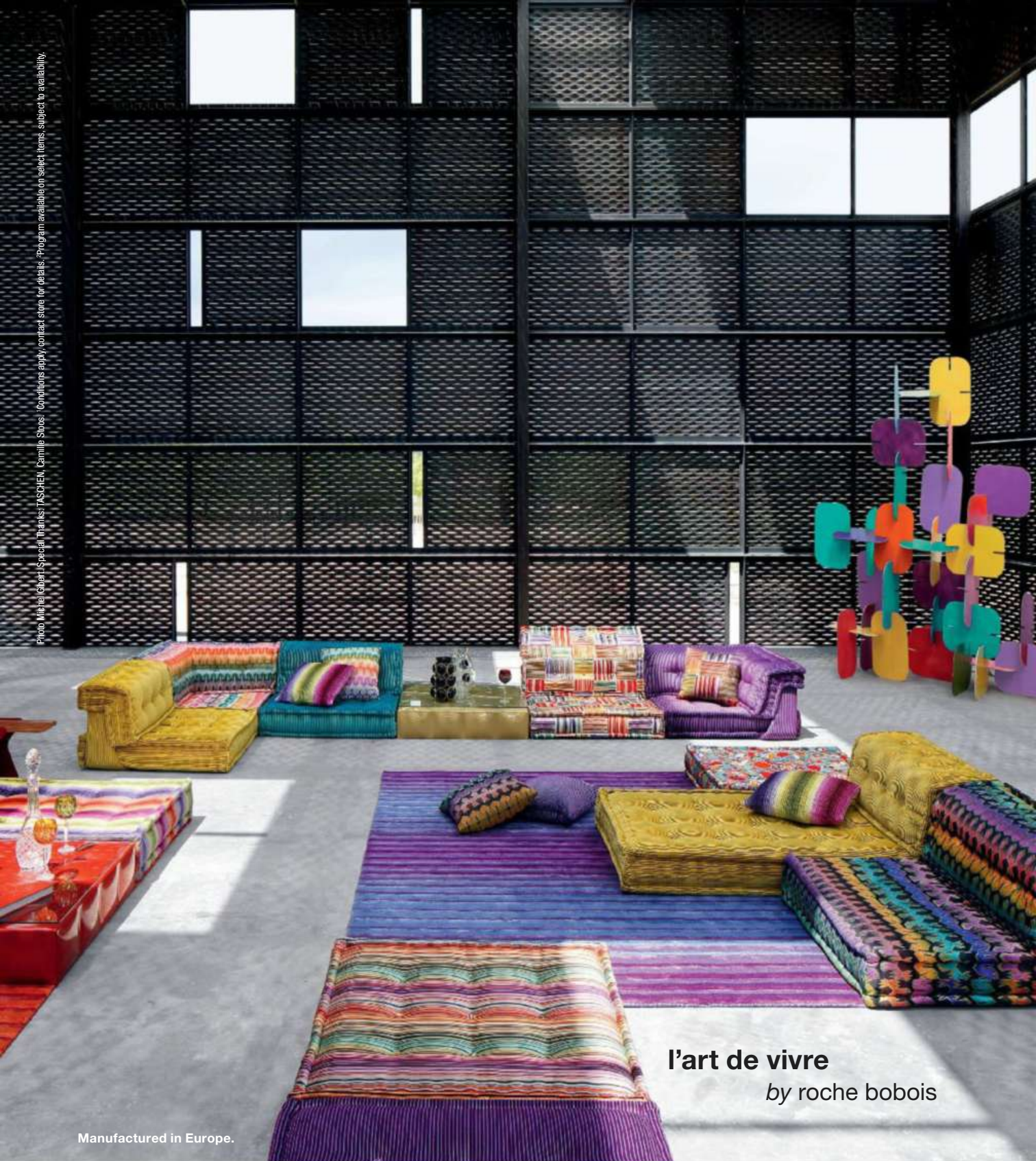
The Italian mirrors were found at auction.



THE LIVING ROOM

The sofa and armchairs are from the '60s, and the glass coffee table is by Archimede Seguso.





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GLOBAL **5** DESIGN

The Accidental Hacienda

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HUSBAND STUMBLED
ON THIS ABANDONED FACTORY
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VIEW TOWARD THE POOL HOUSE
Kirar and her husband, Richard Frazier, built a pool and pool house, which they're living in while they renovate the main structures. "But we really live outside," Kirar says, "and have all our meals under the trees by the pool."



THE KITCHEN

The counter sink is made of polished gray concrete. "It was poured in place over a wood mold and rebar," Kirar says.



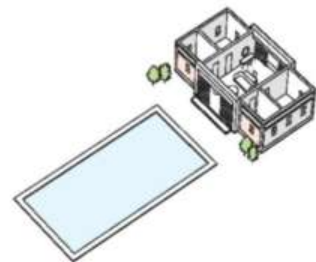
THE MAIN ROOM

Throughout the house are locally made hammocks.



VIEW TOWARD THE POOL FROM THE MAIN ROOM

Behind the dining table is woven furniture designed by Kirar.



FINE ARTIST TURNED furniture and interior designer Laura Kirar was at a wedding in Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula with her husband, Richard Frazier, when they decided to take a drive. "We saw a smokestack in the distance, so we went to see what was there," Kirar recalls. "We found what looked like an abandoned hacienda; we climbed the stone walls and saw these beautiful ruins." The couple wandered around the property, when "suddenly there was a sun shower, and, I'm not kidding, a rainbow appeared. I said, 'This is a sign we should live here.'" Kirar

and Frazier, who live in a Williamsburg loft, now visit the 40-acre Hacienda Subin, outside of Mérida, several times a year. On Saturdays, they go into the city for the Slow Food market. "We buy organic eggs, tamales. You can even get a decent bagel made by a Chicago expat," Kirar says. She and Frazier built a pool and a two-bedroom pool house; they are staying there while they renovate the main buildings, a 1730s house and an 1890s former sisal factory that will hold a gallery and performance space. "It's a future concept that awaits a roof," says Kirar.



THE BEDROOM

The bedcover is from the '60s, and the embroidered sheets are Kirar's designs. The standing lamp by the Mérida collaborative Takto is made of sisal string.

WENDY GOODMAN



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The CULTURE PAGES

The 38 people
it took to write and
produce the new
Selena Gomez  ^{p. 102} album.
Steven Soderbergh,
 ^{p. 104} speed-demon
TV auteur. In bed with
Elton John.  ^{p. 110} **Judith
Light**  introduces
Keira Knightley  ^{p. 114} to
Broadway. The real
motives of **Drake's**  ^{p. 116}
remixes. Driving in
cars with  ^{p. 120} **Jay Leno**.

PLUS: Critics, Parties, and To Do.

It Takes 38 People to Make a Selena Gomez Album

Who they all are, and what they do. *By Nick Murray*

~~~~~  
REVIVAL will be released on October 9.

THERE'S ONLY ONE person on the cover of Selena Gomez's new album, but the liner notes list 37 other songwriters and producers.

That includes Scandinavian production teams, Charli XCX, and the guy who got "Good for You" ready for A\$AP Rocky. This is the village that it took to make the 16-track deluxe edition of the pop starlet's *Revival*.

## TIM BLACKSMITH AND DANNY D

*producers*

These two manage Stargate and handle publishing for Charli XCX.

## CHARLI XCX

*writer*

Aside from her own albums, Charli XCX has written Charli XCX-style (that is, exuberantly bubblegummy) tracks for Gwen Stefani and Iggy Azalea.

## DUBKILLER

*producer*

A Rock Mafia pupil.

## ADAM SCHMALHOLZ

*writer*

Also known as In-Q, he helps pen lyrics for Rock Mafia productions.

## MATTMAN & ROBIN

MATTIAS LARSSON  
AND ROBIN FREDRIKSSON

*writers and producers*

These Swedes are recent Max Martin protégés.

## CHRIS BRAIDE

*writer and producer*

Braide worked frequently with '80s Britpop stalwarts Squeeze (in the '90s, though).

## SHANE STEVENS

*writer*

Stevens is a Nashville songwriter who has turned his attention to pop.

## BIBI BOURELLY

*writer*

Boureilly launched her career by co-writing Rihanna's "Bitch Better Have My Money."

## ASAP ROCKY

*writer and producer*

A rap superstar, Rocky contributes a verse.

## MILES WALKER

*producer*

Now a Stargate mentee, Walker was formerly an engineer for Usher's label, Ush Records.

## KENT AND CATO SUNDBERG

*writers*

Stargate has produced this Norwegian duo.

## FRANK DUKES

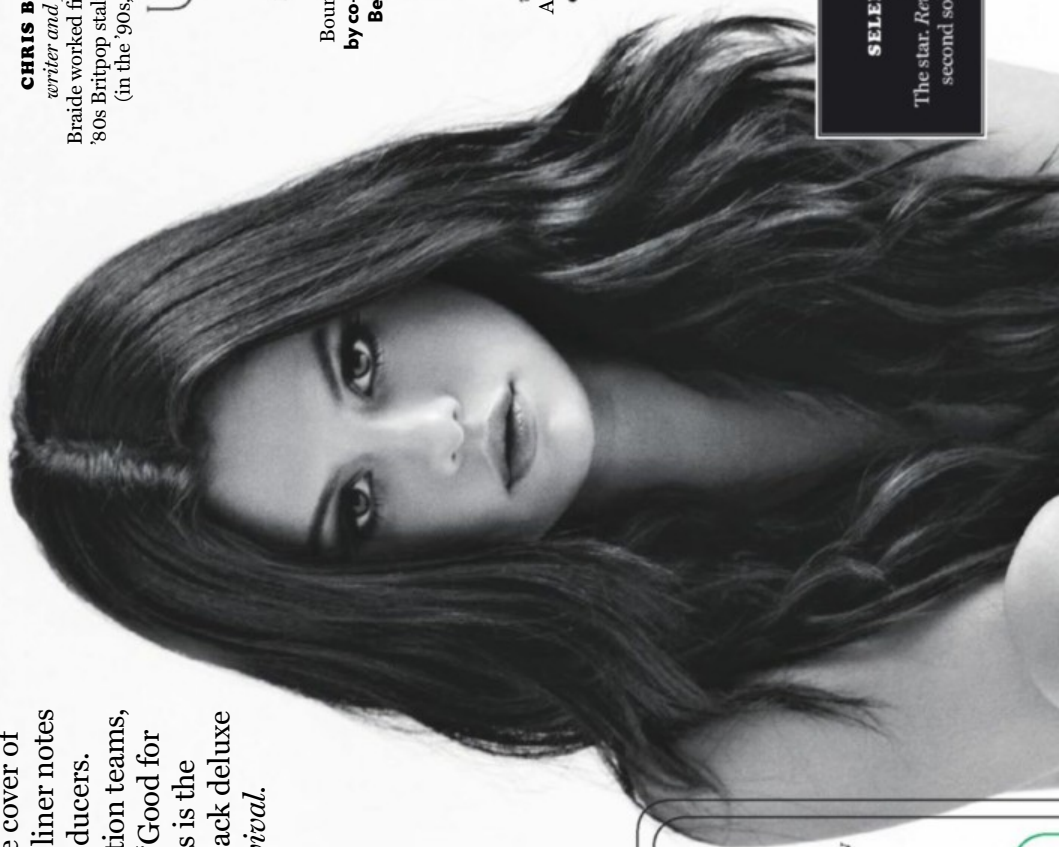
*producer*

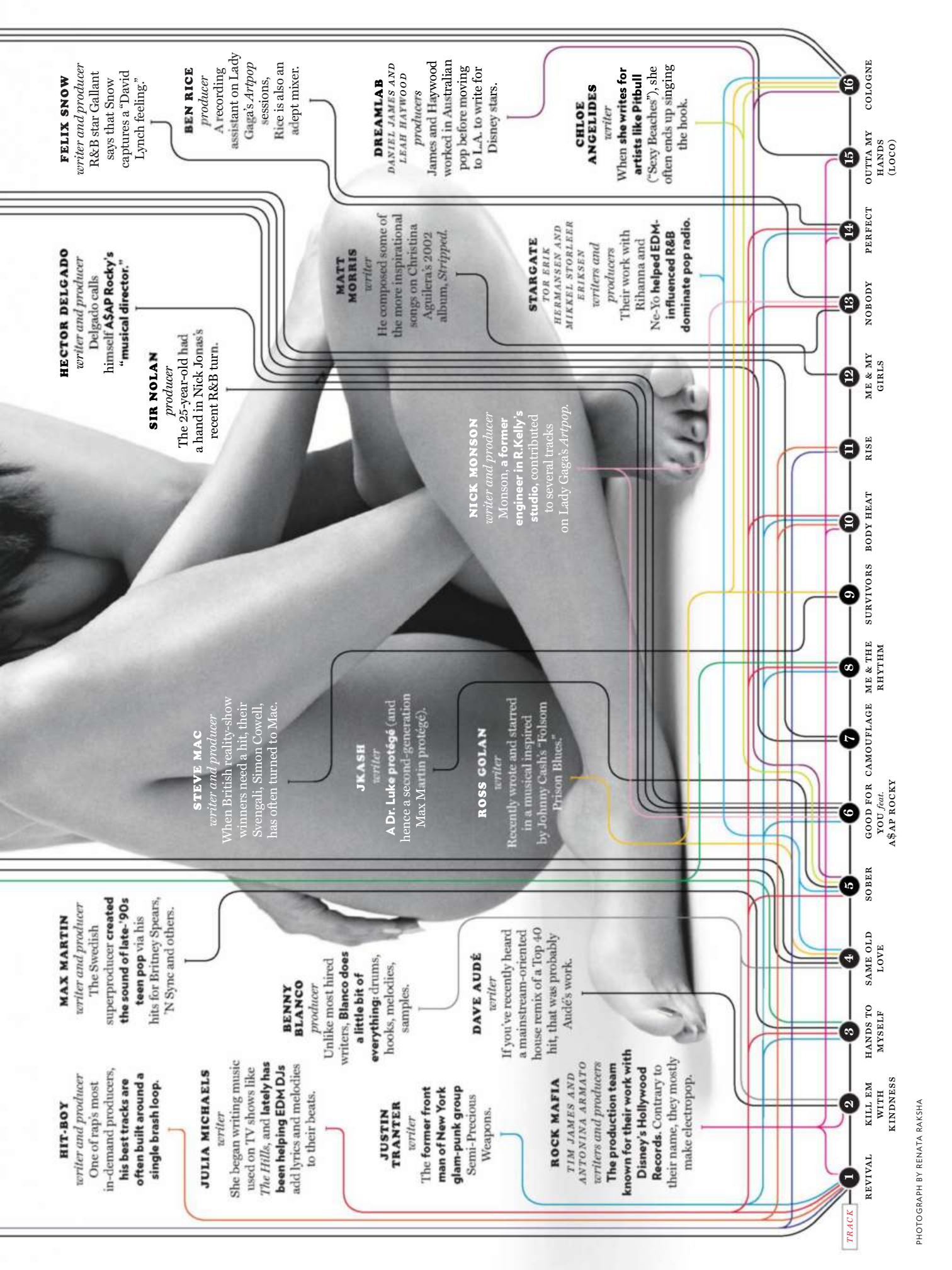
Won a Grammy for his production work on Eminem's *Marshall Mathers LP 2*.

## SELENA GOMEZ

*writer*

The star, *Revival* is the singer's second solo studio album.





#### HIT-BOY

writer and producer

One of rap's most in-demand producers, his best tracks are often built around a single brash loop.

#### JULIA MICHAELS

writer

She began writing music used on TV shows like *The Hills*, and lately has been helping EDM DJs add lyrics and melodies to their beats.

#### BENNY BLANCO

producer

Unlike most hired writers, Blanco does everything: drums, hooks, melodies, samples.

#### JUSTIN TRANTER

writer

The former front man of New York glam-punk group Semi-Precious Weapons.

#### DAVE AUDÉ

writer

If you've recently heard a mainstream-oriented house remix of a Top 40 hit, that was probably Audé's work.

#### ROCK MAFIA

TIM JAMES AND ANTONINA ARMATO

writers and producers

The production team known for their work with Disney's Hollywood Records. Contrary to their name, they mostly make electropop.

#### MAX MARTIN

writer and producer

The Swedish superproducer created the sound of late-'90s teen pop via his hits for Britney Spears, 'N Sync and others.

#### STEVE MAC

writer and producer

When British reality-show winners need a hit, their winners need a hit, their winners, Simon Cowell, has often turned to Mac.

#### JKASH

writer

A Dr. Luke protégé (and hence a second-generation Max Martin protégé).

#### ROSS GOLAN

writer

Recently wrote and starred in a musical inspired by Johnny Cash's "Folsom Prison Blues."

#### NICK MONSON

writer and producer

Monson, a former engineer in R.Kelly's studio, contributed to several tracks on Lady Gaga's *Artpop*.

#### MATT MORRIS

writer

He composed some of the more inspirational songs on Christina Aguilera's 2002 album, *Stripped*.

#### STARGATE

TOR ERIK HERMANSEN AND MIKKEL STORLEER

writers and producers

Their work with Rihanna and Ne-Yo helped EDM-influenced R&B dominate pop radio.

#### HECTOR DELGADO

writer and producer

Delgado calls himself A\$AP Rocky's "musical director."

#### SIR NOLAN

producer

The 25-year-old had a hand in Nick Jonas's recent R&B turn.

#### BEN RICE

producer

A recording assistant on Lady Gaga's *Artpop* sessions, Rice is also an adept mixer.

#### DREAMLAB

DANIEL JAMES AND LEAH HAYWOOD

producers

James and Haywood worked in Australian pop before moving to L.A. to write for Disney stars.

#### CHLOE ANGELIDES

writer

When she writes for artists like Pitbull ("Sexy Beaches"), she often ends up singing the hook.

TRACK

1 REVIVAL

2 KILL EM WITH KINDNESS

3 HANDS TO MYSELF

4 SAME OLD LOVE

5 SOBER

6 GOOD FOR CAMOUFLAGE

7 YOU FEEL A\$AP ROCKY

8 ME & THE RHYTHM

9 SURVIVORS

10 BODY HEAT

11 RISE

12 ME & MY GIRLS

13 NOBODY

14 PERFECT

15 OUTTA MY HANDS (LOCO)

16 COLOGNE



THE

# Binge Director

Steven Soderbergh can make a whole season of *The Knick* almost as fast as you can watch it.

By MATT ZOLLER SEITZ

~~~~~  
THE KNICK's second season debuts October 16 on Cinemax.

STEVEN SODERBERGH is in motion. It's a warm day in Greenpoint, and the 52-year-old director, cinematographer, editor, and executive producer of Cinemax's late-Victorian-era hospital drama *The Knick* is on the show's main set, camera in hand, circling a table in a surgical theater, blocking a scene in which a patient's gallbladder is removed. Soderbergh speaks softly. The cast and crew hang on every word. Then he starts shooting. He is moving, pausing, repositioning the actors, and moving some more. Technicians and writers gather just out of camera range, staring at an iPad that's patched into Soderbergh's camera via wireless, as the scene is sculpted and refined in real time. If you watch the screen, you can see aesthetic questions being asked and answered by the shifting positions of the actors in relation to Soderbergh's lens. *What is the point of this scene, this shot, this camera movement? Where is the best place to begin? On André Holland, who plays Algernon Edwards, the hospital's acting chief of surgery? Or on Clive Owen, who plays Edwards's onetime boss, the brilliant surgeon, medical inventor, and self-destructive opium addict John W. "Thack" Thackeray? Perhaps the first shot should both start and end with a close-up of medical instruments used in the procedure? Would that be repetitious? Okay, maybe the shot should end farther away from the actors, and then the next shot should pick up in*





close-up? Ah, yes, there we go, that worked. Much better. With its elaborately choreographed and composed long shots, this is the kind of scene that might take three hours to complete on network hospital dramas and even longer on Hollywood movies. Soderbergh knocks it out in less than two.

His direction of *The Knick* is unusual in pretty much every imaginable way, but let's start with the fact that it's all his: Soderbergh helmed the entirety of the show's first ten-episode season, which aired late last year, and did the same for season two, which premieres on October 16. For all of its visual evolution in recent decades, TV is still a writer-producer's medium where series directors rotate in and out as needed, rarely overseeing more than two or three episodes in a row. Occasionally one person might direct eight back-to-back episodes of a limited-run project like *The Honorable Woman* (Hugo Blick) or *True Detective's* first season (Cary Joji Fukunaga). And once in a great while you'll see the majority of a long-running series directed by a single person, as with *Louie* (Louis C.K.)—but rarely on a show with as many moving parts as *The Knick*, and in such a punishingly tight time frame. Soderbergh has now directed 20 hours of a lavish costume drama at the speed of a run-and-gun indie film: Both seasons wrapped, according to *The Knick* co-creator and co-writer Jack Amiel, in about 150 days, "which is less time than a lot of crews would spend shooting one big movie." *The Knick* shoots eight to nine script pages a day, double the typical rate for a TV drama, and burns through an hour-long episode in just seven days, versus the industry norm of ten to 14.

The Knick's second season opens with a good portion of the main cast scattered to the winds: Thack has been ousted as chief of surgery for his drug use and is feeding his addiction by performing facial reconstructions on syphilis victims; the former nun Sister Harriet (Cara Seymour) has been kicked out of the order for facilitating abortions; hospital-board member Cornelia Robertson (Juliet Rylance) is in San Francisco agitating against the quarantine of Chinese-Americans during a bubonic-plague epidemic. The first couple of new episodes maneuver them back into the Knickerbocker Hospital and set the season's plot in motion, mixing in more signifiers of the city's ongoing evolution toward moder-

nity, such as the replacement of the hospital's horse-drawn carriage with "horseless" ones and the increased prominence of electric lightbulbs.

The show's style is different, too. More so than in season one, scenes in season two often consist of long, sinuous camera moves and a few tight close-ups. Sometimes, during a scene with long monologues, Soderbergh will focus on the face of a single listening character and not cut away. "There are moments when you don't think it's your scene, but it is," says Eve Hewson, who plays ER nurse Lucy Elkins, Thackery's lover. *The Knick* can look more like a John Ford or William Wyler or Orson Welles movie, in which every image is carefully considered, than most modern scripted TV, where the goal is mainly to capture performances and push the story along. Soderbergh mentions Welles's *The Trial* and *Chimes at Midnight*, in particular, as influences on the look of season two, with their "sustained shots that go on forever." "It's kind of like the arcade game with the water-filled tube and the ball," he says during a lunch that lasts exactly 18 and a half minutes. "How long can I keep this shot interesting, dynamic, and narratively appropriate to

what's going on, given the elements that I want to emphasize?"

Soderbergh shoots with a handheld camera, sometimes while being pushed by grips on a small, wheeled platform that he calls a "dolly du derrière." This allows him to participate in scenes as an equal with his actors, rather than being "50 feet away, behind the monitor," he says. "I like the intimacy of that, and I think the actors like knowing how close I am." Watching him direct is akin to witnessing an athletic performance. Soderbergh walks, jogs, runs, sits, lies on the floor, and hangs half off dollyes while PAs grip his ankles. "When I tell other cameramen what goes on with Steven, they're flabbergasted," says Soderbergh's longtime second cameraman, Patrick O'Brien, who works on only about 30 percent of *The Knick*—usually when Soderbergh needs him to gather extra close-ups in a scene with a lot of characters, operate a crane that he's sitting on, or shoot the other side of a two-person conversation. "He's like a dancer," says Holland. "One time, on the first season, it was bitter winter and we were shooting outside, and he was in this awkward,

crouched-down position, holding the camera and moving at the same time, and midway through the take, his knee gave out and he jumped up and winced in pain. You could hear a pin drop, because you know that his physicality is such a huge part of the show."

Everything and everyone on set is enabling Soderbergh's endurance test. An assistant cameraperson shifts focus via remote control from another room, freeing Soderbergh to concentrate on movement and framing. *The Knick's* standing sets are lit with visible (or "practical") lights—desk lamps, chandeliers, and so forth—to let Soderbergh and his actors move anywhere they want and still get a lovely image. Everyone knows that they have to be as politely relentless and focused as their boss. There are no stand-ins on the set of *The Knick*, no Gulfstream trailers for producers and cast, and no canvas chairs, because no one sits still long enough to require them. A workday here is a nine-to-six sprint, with an hour off for lunch. "Actors love working with this guy," O'Brien says, "because they're not sitting around all day waiting for the set to be lit." Soderbergh tells me: "It keeps the actors on the boil, nobody leaves, and—like we just did—you can power through the whole scene and it's done."

Soderbergh's preferred digital camera, the Red Epic Dragon, also helps. Its low-light capacity has let him shoot handsomely composed scenes, starkly illuminated by a naked lightbulb, a gas lamp, even a match—cinematographic flourishes in the spirit of one of his favorite movies, Stanley Kubrick's 1975 drama *Barry Lyndon*, the first feature to shoot scenes by candlelight. At one point during our conversation, Soderbergh digs his cell phone out of his pocket and calls up a two-minute tracking shot from season two in which Cornelia Robertson moves "through a house with a candle and we follow her, and that's it. Just one candle, and you can see everything!" he says, marveling at the flickering image on his phone.

Most directors would not get handed a handsome period drama to treat as their own personal train set, but that's because they don't have Soderbergh's track record of making stylish, innovative, occasionally commercial art cheap and fast and without much fuss. Since his 1989 debut, the Cannes Palme d'Or winner *sex, lies and videotape*, he has directed 25 features (including the four-and-a-half-hour, two-part biopic *Che*) plus nearly 30 hours of TV (including the 2003 HBO political satire *K Street*, each episode of which was plotted, scripted, shot, cut, and broadcast in five days). He is one of the few American



HOW SODERBERGH STAYS BUSY

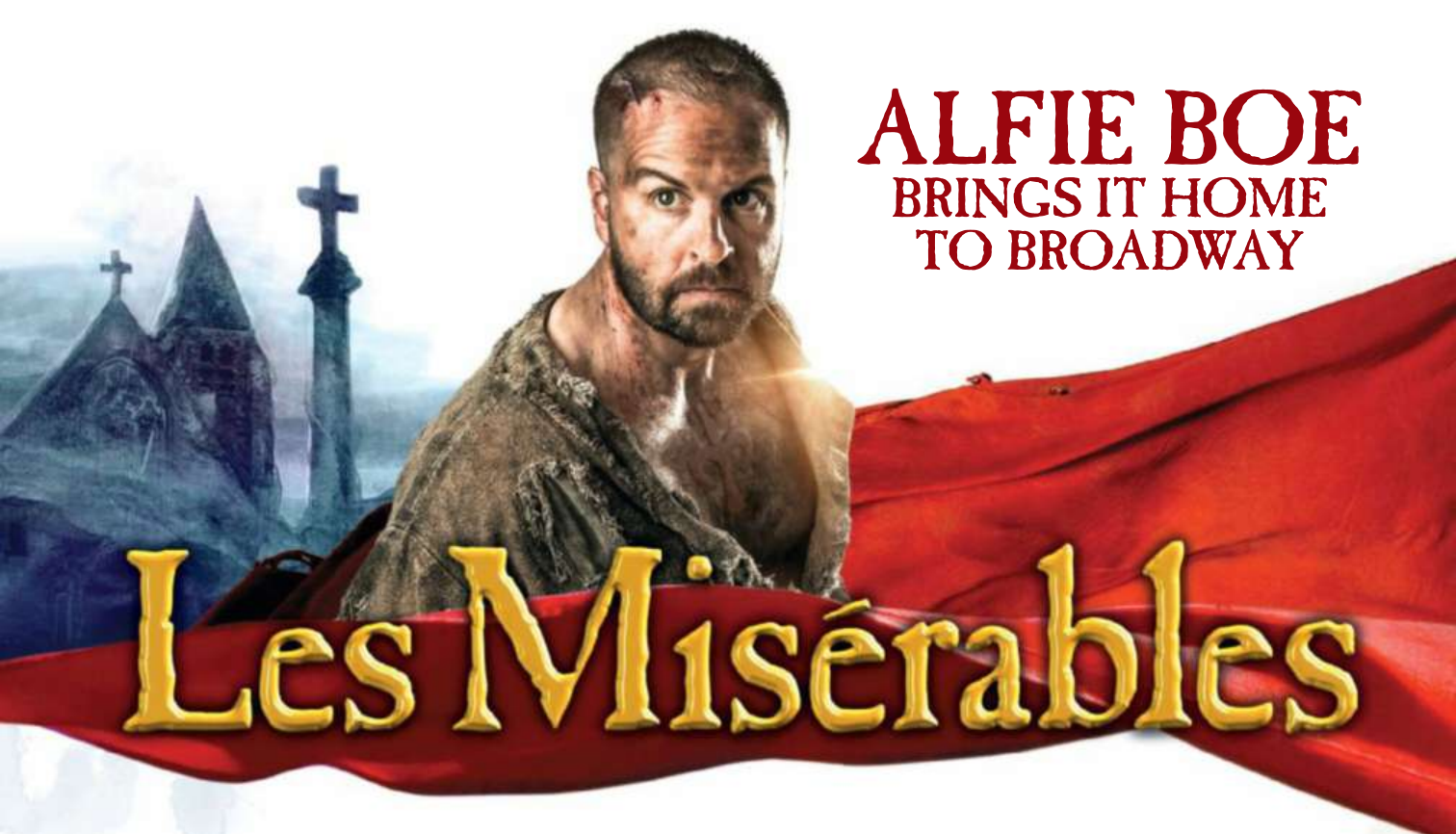
Steven Soderbergh has directed 25 movies of his own.

He's a credited producer on 33 other films.

He's directed 27 hours of television, including one season of *K Street*, two of *The Knick*, and the HBO movie *Behind the Candelabra*.

He's recut his own versions of other directors' films, including *Psycho*, *Heaven's Gate*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and 2001's *A Space Odyssey*.

In 2014 alone, he claims to have watched 108 movies and read 35 books.

A promotional image for the Broadway production of Les Misérables. It features Alfie Boe as Jean Valjean, looking intensely at the camera. He is wearing a brown, textured coat. In the background, there is a red banner and a faint image of a Parisian church with crosses on its roof.

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directors to claim two Oscar nominations for Best Picture during a single calendar year, for 2000's *Erin Brockovich* and *Traf-fic*; he won Best Director for the latter. Every one of his movies—including the comparatively glossy heist thrillers *Ocean's Eleven*, *Twelve*, and *Thirteen*—was produced for what is, by contemporary American studio standards, chump change.

And he is endlessly, perhaps helplessly, prolific. In 2010, he told his friend Matt Damon that he was “retiring” from making theatrical features because he felt he’d exhausted the medium—a statement that was widely misinterpreted to mean that Soderbergh was quitting the business entirely and that launched a thousand jokes along the lines of “In the time it took you to read this tweet about Soderbergh’s retirement, he directed a remake of *Berlin Alexanderplatz*.” Right now he’s got *The Knick*; a show in the works at HBO with Sharon Stone; and an executive-producer credit on Amazon’s new *Red Oaks*, a circa-1985 period drama directed by David Gordon

Green (*Pineapple Express*). He’s fascinated by long-form storytelling, which he says is “very different” from features and offers more possibilities for experimentation, because TV’s aesthetic hasn’t been developed as deeply as cinema’s. Whole seasons of *The Knick* are written before a frame is shot, and any subsequent revisions are about in-the-moment problem solving. “Having all ten scripts beforehand allows me to sort of think on a macro level for longer, and that’s good for me,” he says.

Soderbergh thinks like an editor while he’s shooting, never wasting anyone’s time on anything he thinks he might not use. “Steven doesn’t cover the same thing 19 times,” says Amiel. “He’s going to do it once and know that’ll be his first half of the scene and we’re not going to shoot it again. [For] the second half of the scene, he may shoot three or four pieces of coverage, but it’s because he’s already cut the whole scene in his head. He already knows.” “Often the shot that ends up in the show is the first one that we got,” says Holland. “Early on he said

to me, ‘I don’t see any reason why we need to make things any more complicated than they have to be.’”

At 6 p.m. each day, Soderbergh climbs into the backseat of a van and starts cutting the day’s footage on a laptop on the way home from the set. He finishes by eight, posts the results on a password-protected website, and goes to dinner, a play, or a movie with his wife, Jules Asner. “People on the crew will say, ‘I can’t wait to see what we did today,’” says production designer Howard Cummings. Changes in technology have allowed Soderbergh to become imaginatively fused to his digital cameras, laptop, smartphone, and the internet. “I have to show this to you; I can probably pull it up on my phone,” Soderbergh says, hunting through footage folders on *The Knick*’s post-production website and calling up an acrobatic long take that follows actors through a fund-raising ball. “If I had this shit at the beginning of my career,” he says as the phone screen fills up with costumed extras, “the movies would’ve been a lot better.” ■

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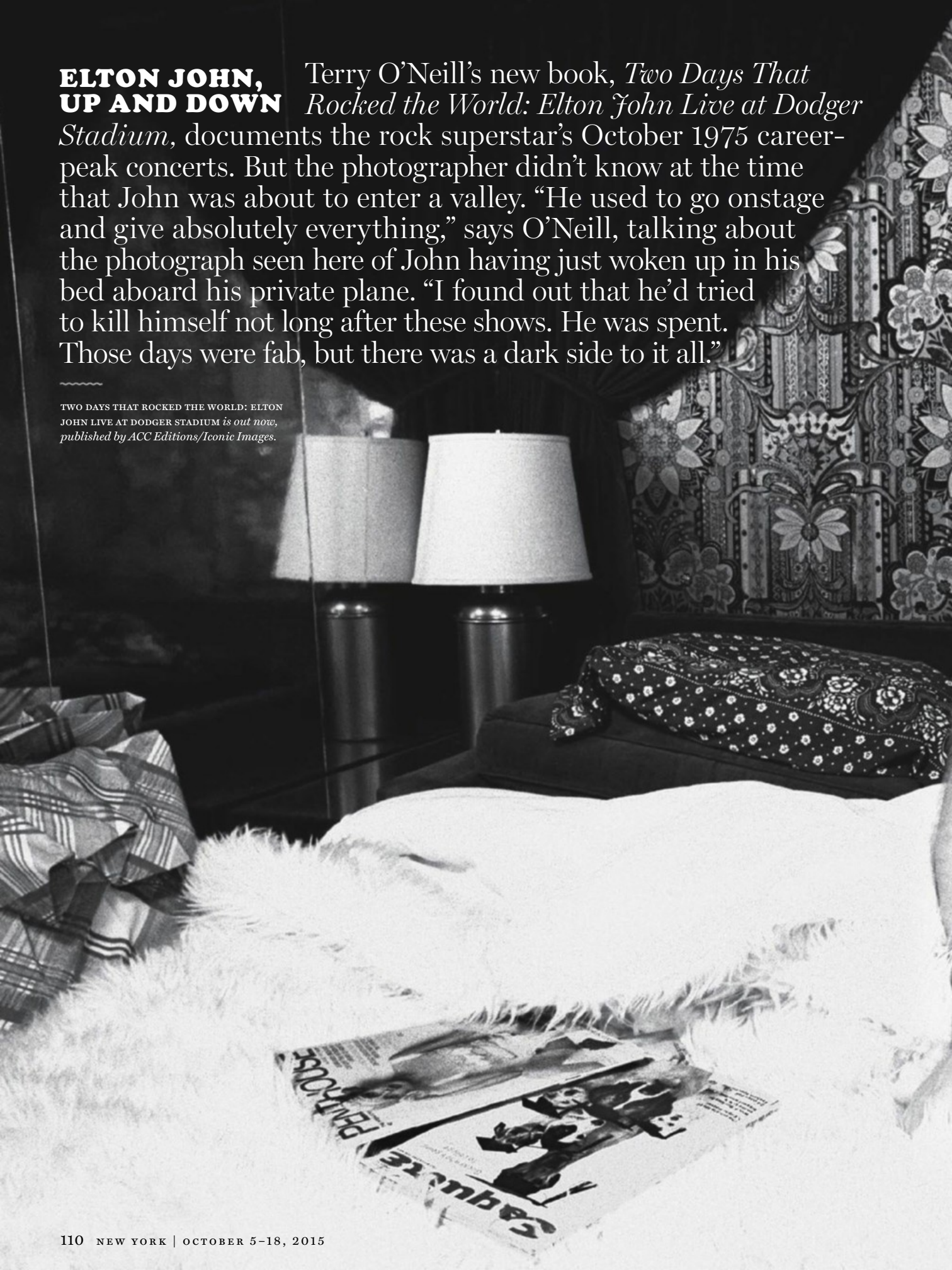
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**ELTON JOHN,
UP AND DOWN**

Terry O'Neill's new book, *Two Days That Rocked the World: Elton John Live at Dodger Stadium*, documents the rock superstar's October 1975 career-peak concerts. But the photographer didn't know at the time that John was about to enter a valley. "He used to go onstage and give absolutely everything," says O'Neill, talking about the photograph seen here of John having just woken up in his bed aboard his private plane. "I found out that he'd tried to kill himself not long after these shows. He was spent. Those days were fab, but there was a dark side to it all."

~~~~~  
TWO DAYS THAT ROCKED THE WORLD: ELTON JOHN LIVE AT DODGER STADIUM is out now, published by ACC Editions/Iconic Images.







# Translating France's Most Dangerous Author

Lorin Stein, editor of *The Paris Review*, on tackling Michel Houellebecq's *Submission* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux), a novel set in a near-future France that has just elected a Muslim president.

SUBMISSION: A NOVEL will be published October 20.

ça m'excitait assez,  
compte tenu des circonstances  
politiques globales, de  
choisir une musulmane.

## ENGLISH TRANSLATION

"It was arousing, in a way, to pick a Muslim, given the overall political situation."

## THE SCENE

Here, the book's protagonist, François, a professor who specializes in decadent 19th-century writer J. K. Huysmans, is choosing a prostitute online in the year 2022.

## THE PROBLEM

"The translation was finding its rhythm," says Stein. "But very near to the end of the book, there was this sentence that hadn't seemed

funny to me and that I couldn't translate." He discussed the problem with his editor, Mitzi Angel, who grew up speaking French.

## THE FIRST, FAILED ATTEMPT

"At first I wrote, 'Given the political situation, choosing a Muslim turned me on.' But this was very un-Houellebecqian. It's too fast, the emphasis falls at the end of the sentence, the tone

is ponderously casual."

## THE AHA MOMENT

"One of us came up with *arouse*: 'Arousing, in a way'—for me, that's how Houellebecq sounds. And even though the syntax doesn't track the French exactly, it preserves the air of anticlimax, the slight fussiness, the stoicism of the original. The sentence became less brutal, less vulgar."

## THE REVISIONS

"Figuring out that one sentence made me go back to the beginning and try to preserve this tone that's a bit Buster Keaton-ish. It's a little slow, a little narcotized."

## THE FINAL RESULT

"Houellebecq has the reputation of writing bad prose. The more time I spent with this book, the more impressed I was. He doesn't put in extra brushstrokes."

IAN EPSTEIN

# The Bespoke Supergirl

Oscar-winning costume designer Colleen Atwood explains how she tweaked an iconic costume for CBS's new reboot.

SUPERGIRL premieres October 26.

1

## THE CAPE

"What I did here is I made an undersuit that zipped up beneath her costume—that holds her cape in place. **The weight of the cape isn't pulling the costume around on her body**, so it balances a lot better for action scenes."

2

## THE LOGO

"The S is designed to be looked at in flight. I had Melissa [Benoist, the star of the series] lie on the table in the costume during the fitting to make sure that **it looks good horizontally**."

3

## THE FABRIC

"It's called Eurojersey: It has a four-way-stretch quality, which is good for action. **The S is "grown" on the fabric with an ink** that's layered on to give it dimension."

4

## THE TIGHTS

"I put tights on her because **I wanted the leg to be shaded a little bit darker**. It looked better than just a bare, nude tone—Melissa's legs are nice; she didn't really need anything!" I.E.



From concept sketch to production.

PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY OF CBS (SUPERGIRL)





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*Photograph by Erik Madigan Heck*





# Taking Cues From Keira Knightley

THÉRÈSE RAQUIN opens  
October 29 at Roundabout Theatre  
Company's Studio 54.

“Come on, mother,” Keira Knightley jokingly says as she helps Judith Light to her feet in a quiet room at the Studio 54 theater. It’s the day before previews begin for Knightley’s Broadway debut as the title character in an adaptation of Zola’s dark romantic novel *Thérèse Raquin*. (Light plays Thérèse’s aunt and caretaker.) “She’s so free,” Light raves of Knightley. “She’ll interrupt rehearsal to say, ‘Wait, what are we doing here?’ It gives the rest of us permission to do that too. She’s fearless.” Knightley bursts into laughter: “Am I giving that impression?”

REBECCA MILZOFF





## The Politics of the Co-sign

Drake's savvy, self-interested approach to remixing.

By LINDSAY ZOLADZ

*Drake & Future's WHAT A TIME TO BE ALIVE is available now.*

IN LATE SEPTEMBER, *The Fader* published Drake's first major magazine interview in a year and a half, which is how long it's been since *Rolling Stone* had pulled his promised cover at the last minute and instead eulogized Philip Seymour Hoffman. ("RIP to Phillip Seymour Hoffman [*sic*]," Drake tweeted about this perceived injustice. "All respect due. But the press is evil.") In the *Fader* profile, the artist formerly known as Jimmy Brooks speaks candidly about his creative process. One of the interview's most revealing moments comes when Drake explains why he likes to remix hit songs by up-and-coming artists like Migos and, more recently, Mississauga crooner Ramriddlz. "I'll hear people's stuff," Drake said, "and ... It's just, literally, I've recognized the potential and the greatness in this piece and I want to take my stab at it, too."

The modern Drake remix as we know it dates to mid-2013, when he dropped a few verses on a rereleased version of Migos's "Versace." It was a well-timed assist; Drake's remix helped the song crack the *Billboard* "Hot 100." And he did something similar last August, when he released his own version of rising DIY-R&B oddball I Love Makonnen's "Club Going Up on a Tuesday." The original song was probably too strange for radio, but radio was not going to ignore a new Drake.

Drake's recent remixes, though, haven't been as generous. His version of Ramriddlz's "Sweeterman" doesn't even feature the Ramriddlz's voice, and his current smash, "Hotline Bling," owes such heavy stylistic debts to the Virginia rapper D.R.A.M.'s "Cha Cha" that people have dubbed it "Hotline Bling (Cha-Cha Remix)." Are these homages or erasures? It depends. You could see it as a popular artist sharing the spotlight and giving upstarts strategic boosts into the mainstream. Or you could see a high-school queen bee who begrudgingly befriends the new "It" girl just so, down the line, she can claim credit for her popularity.

I can pinpoint the day I jumped from the former camp to the latter: May 5, when Drake released his remix of Fetty Wap's hit "My Way." Fetty's ascent to stardom didn't need a boost: "Trap Queen" was already well on its way to becoming a song-of-the-summer juggernaut. Drake's past artist endorsements have been endearingly left-field, but this one—obvious, a little greedy—felt off-brand.

Drake is not the only famous rapper who does this stuff. But the difference is that, "Trap Queen" aside, Drake's remixes often eclipse the originals. What he's doing feels more in line with what Taylor Swift has been doing on her *1989* tour: inviting hitmakers onstage to duet on one of their songs, thus making it hers, too.

This summer it became fashionable to make fun of Taylor's effort to become our all-conquering pop overlord, but Drake's methods for staying on top are seen as beyond reproach. Meek Mill's accusations that Drake uses ghostwriters, and Drake's eventual shrug, have only made him stronger. Whatever Drake does becomes the new normal.

ON SUNDAY, September 20, Drake surprise-released *What a Time to Be Alive*, an 11-song collaboration with Atlanta rapper Future. The release would sell nearly 375,000 copies in its first week, which gave *WATTB*A the third-highest debut week of any album this year, bested

by Drake's other surprise-release mixtape, *If You're Reading This It's Too Late*, which just became the only 2015 album to surpass a million copies sold. Drake has completely dominated the album chart in 2015 without putting out a proper album.

*WATTTA* has been widely regarded as a mixtape, although that's a funny word. Some think a mixtape these days is anything released for free online; purists believe something with original beats doesn't qualify. But *WATTTA* features all-new beats from Metro Boomin (and others), and tons of people paid for it on iTunes. It's easy to think that the digital era has hastened the Death of the Album, but Drake's approach has actually buoyed the idea that the album is the format for an artist's most meaningful statements. He's called *WATTTA* "a little soundtrack for people that need it right now," the most revealing word in that phrase being *little*. He also spoke of *If You're Reading This* self-critically in that *Fader* interview: "There's corners cut ..." The tossed-off release strategies of these efforts are the ultimate humblebrags. Drake knows that right now even his drafts will be sales blockbusters.

*WATTTA* is a minor release for Drake and Future both, which means that, once again, Drake's involvement here seems more strategic than anything. Future is having a hot year, and it feels like a good time for Drake to have this guy publicly on his side. And vice versa. In July, Future's *Dirty Sprite 2* sold 140,000 copies in its first week. *WATTTA* did almost triple that—such is the Drake Bump.

Something about all of this makes Fetty Wap's tuneful, spirited self-titled debut album, which came out on September 25, feel like even more of an achievement. I can't remember the last time you could say this about a high-profile rap release, but nobody on this record was famous a year ago. There are no career-sanctioning guest verses from superstars, no hooks sung by up-and-coming starlets—just Fetty, his Remy Boyz crew, and their infectious exuberance. I can't recall the last time a 20-song album moved with such spring in its step.

Fetty Wap hits a sweet spot between the familiar and strange—palatable enough for mass appeal, but singular enough to feel like a thoroughly personal vision. But more important, his story will serve as an inspiring tale for plenty of aspiring rappers without the assistance of a well-connected benefactor. Drake's co-sign is already a forgettable blip in the narrative. Fetty's rise was his alone. ■

## The Ryan Murphy Character Index

*Scream Queens*, the latest effort from Ryan Murphy, is both new and not. The premise—sorority murders!—is fresh(ish). But some of the characters may seem a little familiar. Here are nine very specific types that have populated the writer-producer's TV shows. *By Brian Moylan*

SCREAM QUEENS airs Tuesdays on Fox.

| THE ARCHETYPE                                                                                          | POPULAR                                                                                                 | NIP/TUCK                                                                                                        | GLEE                                                                                              | AMERICAN HORROR STORY                                                                                                     | THE NEW NORMAL                                                                                 | SCREAM QUEENS                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>HOT GAY GUY</b><br><i>Murphy tends to have this character type appear shirtless.</i>                |                                                                                                         | <br>Christian<br>(In a dream!) | <br>Kurt       | <br>Andy<br>(Freak Show)               | <br>David   | <br>Boone          |
| <b>BITCHY BLONDE</b><br><i>A young, attractive, usually rich blonde terror.</i>                        | <br>Nicole             |                                                                                                                 | <br>Quinn      | <br>Madison<br>(Coven)                 |                                                                                                | <br>Chanel         |
| <b>CRUSADER</b><br><i>A hero who tries, via virtue and determination, to fix a broken institution.</i> | <br>Sam                | <br>Sean                       | <br>Rachel     | <br>Zoe<br>(Coven)                     |                                                                                                | <br>Grace          |
| <b>CAMP QUEEN</b><br><i>An icon who swans around, chewing scenery, delivering catty lines.</i>         | <br>Cherry<br>Cherry | <br>Annette                  |                                                                                                   | <br>Every Jessica<br>Lange Character | <br>Jane  | <br>Cathy        |
| <b>CARETAKER</b><br><i>Attempts to protect a group, usually of teens, from various villains.</i>       |                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                 | <br>Emma     | <br>Cordelia<br>(Coven)              |                                                                                                | <br>Gigi         |
| <b>HOT STUPID DUDE</b><br><i>He looks like there should be ten more candles on his birthday cake.</i>  | <br>Josh             |                                                                                                                 | <br>Finn     | <br>Kyle<br>(Coven)                  | <br>Clay  | <br>Chad         |
| <b>FUNNY DITZY GIRL</b><br><i>She doesn't have many lines, but they're always memorable.</i>           | <br>Mary<br>Cherry   |                                                                                                                 | <br>Brittany |                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                | <br>Chanel No. 3 |
| <b>DIFFERENTLY ABLED PERSON</b><br><i>The butt of jokes, but often insightful.</i>                     |                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                 | <br>Artie    | <br>Everyone on<br>Freak Show        |                                                                                                | <br>Neck Brace   |
| <b>SASSY BLACK GIRL</b><br><i>Also a common trope, for better or worse, outside the Murphy-verse.</i>  |                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                 | <br>Mercedes | <br>Desiree<br>(Freak Show)          | <br>Rocky | <br>ZayDay       |





# Andrew Garfield Has Hit the Celebrity Wall

99 HOMES goes into wide release on October 9.

"WHY THE FUCK AM I DOING THIS?" asked Andrew Garfield. He was sitting in a Beverly Hills hotel room, recalling the dread he'd felt that morning as he faced a long day of press to promote his new film, the housing-bubble drama *99 Homes*. "Coming in today to do interviews, I'm like, *Why?* I know that I'm an actor and it's part of the job, and I feel lucky I get to do that, but it's such a weird thing. What do I have to say?"

KYLE BUCHANAN

**99 Homes** illustrates something about American society that's rarely portrayed onscreen, which is how the upper class persuades lower-income people to vote against their own best interests. [Deep sigh.] Too heavy too soon? I love it. It makes me feel ... how does it make me feel? Please

carry on, sorry. The character you play ought to be rioting against a system that screws over lower-income people like him, but there's this carrot on a stick offered by the rich: Don't tear down the system, because wealth could be just around the corner. Is that what you responded to when you were

asked to join this movie?

Yeah, in a much less articulate way. I didn't think I was all that articulate. For me, it was very articulate. You fucking said it. Hearing you talk, I just suddenly feel like my head is wrapped in cellophane. Why don't you just do this interview? You're saying the right shit. I don't think my editors would appreciate it if I wrote only "Andrew Garfield nods periodically." Just attribute what you're saying to me. Yeah, I struggle with it, man. I struggle with it because I'm an

actor, right? And I do believe that films like this are a part of the slow change that every movement undergoes. It's through storytelling that I'm able to ask the question "What power do I have?" Have you found wealth and power to be seductive? Yeah, I have. Something shifted with [playing] Spider-Man. It was a character that I wanted to play my whole life, and not one part of me was indifferent ... but I got incredibly uncomfortable with the attention that came with that job. It was nothing to do with me, it was to do

with this idea of celebrity. Hopefully I'm just more myself as I get older and grow, but in our culture they're telling us to be something totally fucking different. You feel like the culture is hostile to you? Yes. I'm not accepted. None of us are accepted in this culture. We're only accepted if we are ... well, name it. Successful? White. White, famous, heterosexual ... Handsome, charismatic, thin-enough eyebrows to be beautiful but thick enough to still be masculine. We're told constantly that we'll never be enough. It's that dangling-carrot thing. That was my experience with Spider-Man. It's like, "My life is now great!" But in fact, I'm still fucked up in my own ways, and insecure, and scared, and don't really know who I am.

Celebrity is the new religion, as far as I can see, along with money, power, status. When the paparazzi take your picture, you often hold up a sign listing charitable causes. Is that the best way to modify your own celebrity, to figure out something worthy to channel it into? I struggle with this question every day. Who am I? Do I have anything to say? If you tell people what you think about world issues, is that a risk to your celebrity? That's the thing. My priority is the work, and the work is dependent on people not knowing much about me. So where's the balance? Because I do want to make a difference in the world, I really do, and that's a really cheesy thing to want.

***d***

***u***

CLOUD  
design Richard Shemtov



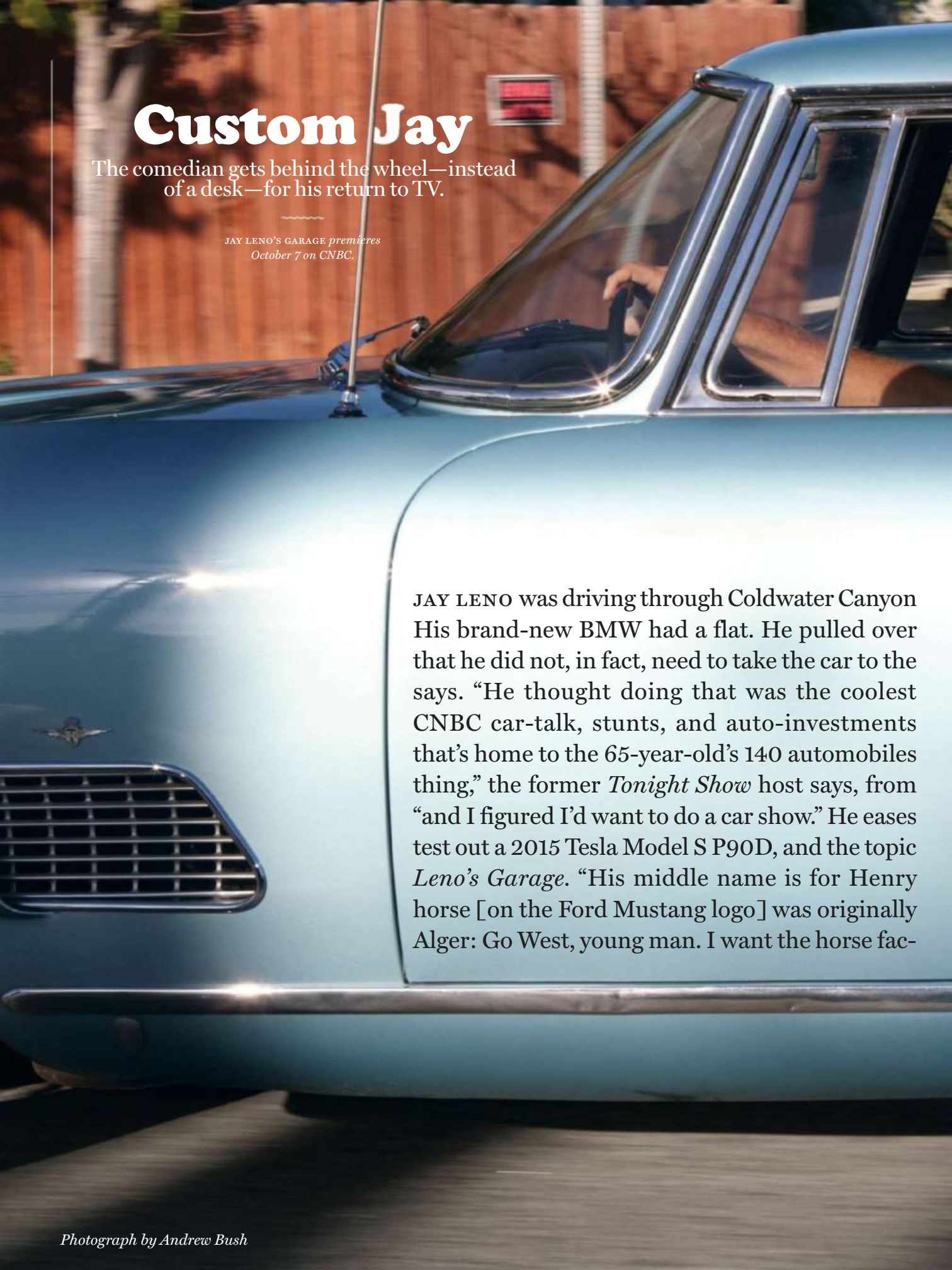
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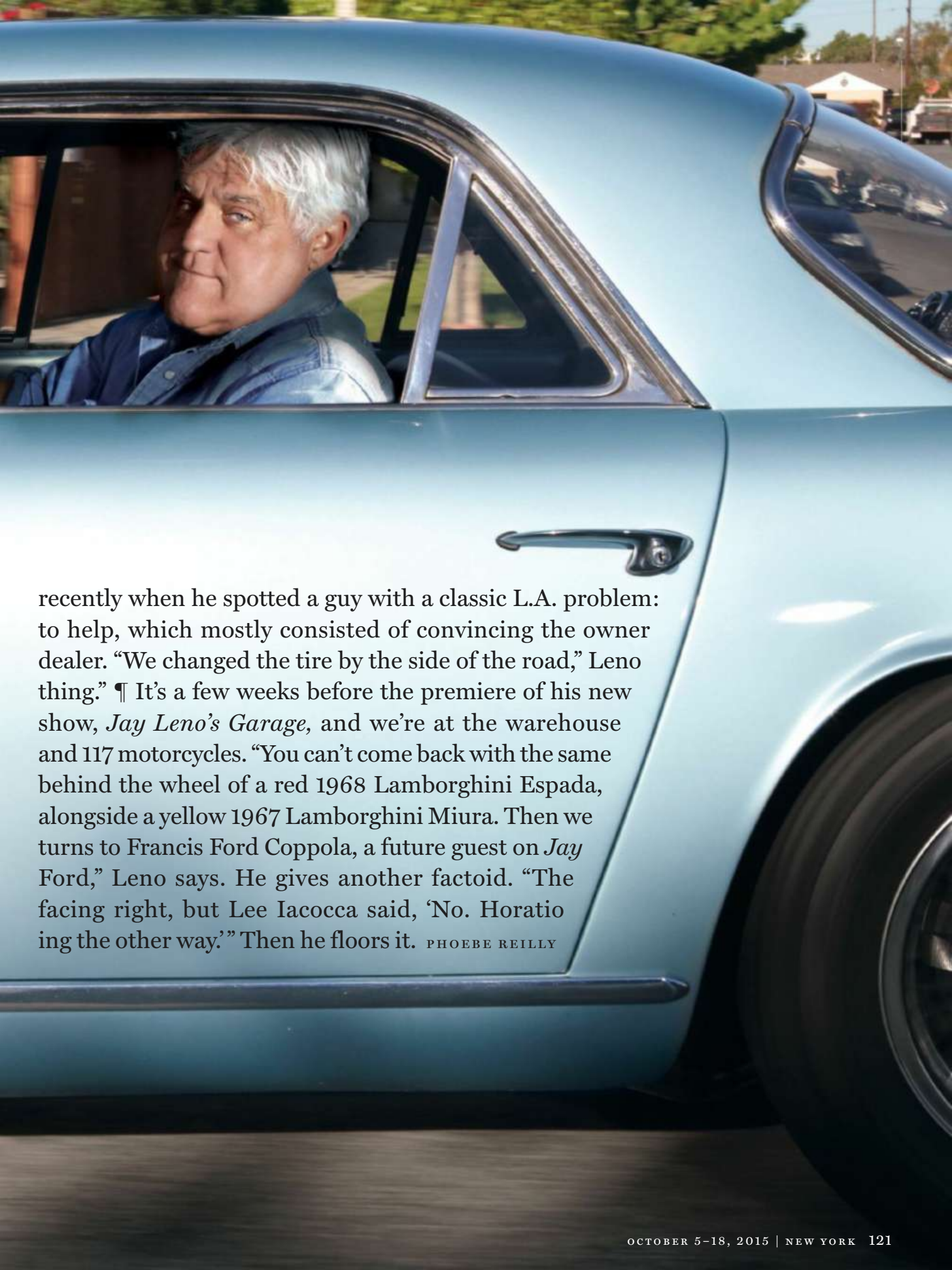


# Custom Jay

The comedian gets behind the wheel—instead of a desk—for his return to TV.

JAY LENO'S GARAGE *premieres*  
October 7 on CNBC.

JAY LENO was driving through Coldwater Canyon. His brand-new BMW had a flat. He pulled over and said that he did not, in fact, need to take the car to the shop. “He thought doing that was the coolest thing,” the former *Tonight Show* host says, from “and I figured I’d want to do a car show.” He eased test out a 2015 Tesla Model S P90D, and the topic *Leno’s Garage*. “His middle name is for Henry Ford’s horse [on the Ford Mustang logo] was originally Alger: Go West, young man. I want the horse fac-



recently when he spotted a guy with a classic L.A. problem: to help, which mostly consisted of convincing the owner dealer. “We changed the tire by the side of the road,” Leno thing.” ¶ It’s a few weeks before the premiere of his new show, *Jay Leno’s Garage*, and we’re at the warehouse and 117 motorcycles. “You can’t come back with the same behind the wheel of a red 1968 Lamborghini Espada, alongside a yellow 1967 Lamborghini Miura. Then we turns to Francis Ford Coppola, a future guest on *Jay Ford*,” Leno says. He gives another factoid. “The facing right, but Lee Iacocca said, ‘No. Horatio ing the other way.’” Then he floors it. PHOEBE REILLY



A composite  
image of over  
1,000 photos.

# The Photograph Our Art Critic Can't Stop Thinking About

By JERRY SALTZ

MARKUS BRUNETTI'S "FACADES" is  
at the Yossi Milo Gallery through October 17.

Among the greatest means ever invented by our species for housing and fabricating faith on Earth are those incredible stone edifices meant to conspire with the higher forces, the tools for knowing God that we call churches. In a series of huge, riveting, incredibly intricate photographic composites—some using as many as 2,000 digital images blended together to create an idealized form, with the highest spires rendered in the same painstaking detail as the lowest steps—the German-born Markus Brunetti prods you to wonder about lofty spiritual intangibles as well as the lives of the people who built and believed in these buildings and religions. Brunetti's depiction (at left) of the cathedral in Magdeburg, Germany, put me on zap with its daring visual distortion and newly revealed symmetries. It's so unreal it becomes its own reality: a trip to a weird architectural-digital-cosmic plane.

MAGDEBURG: DOM ST. MAURITIUS UND KATHARINA, 2011–2015. PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF YOSHI MILO GALLERY, NEW YORK.





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## CRITICS

David Edelstein on *Experimenter*, *Bridge of Spies*, and *Room* ... Jesse Green on Broadway cast recordings ...  
Christian Lorentzen on Garth Risk Hallberg's *City on Fire*.



Jim Gaffigan in  
*Experimenter*.

MOVIES / DAVID EDELSTEIN

## Shock Generator

You'll want to submit  
to Milgram-experiment  
drama *Experimenter*.



THE PLAYFULLY dead-serious drama *Experimenter* depicts the life of Stanley Milgram (Peter Sarsgaard), the Yale social scientist who, in 1961, directed his subjects ("teachers") to deliver shocks of escalating severity to a "learner" in order to gauge their level of obedience to "malevolent authority." The writer-director, Michael Almereyda, clearly sees his protagonist as a master of stagecraft as well as psychology, and he gives the movie a whiff of the circus—a gorgeous, photorealist circus, often against tinted black-and-white backdrops that push its ringmaster into the foreground. Milgram talks to us, shows us things. He puts his work in historical context. He expounds on the role of obedience in turning individuals into instruments of the state—as in Nazi Germany. The word *reflective* suggests a slowdown or cessation of action proper, but *Experimenter* is busily, thrillingly reflective. Its artificiality makes it seem even more alive, more in the present tense.

I've known Almereyda for 35 years (since college) and always marveled at his capacity to keep experimenting in the face of commercial

apathy, rarely with budgets of more than a million dollars. His modern, deadpan-funny *Hamlet* (with Ethan Hawke) was a true Shakespeare *movie*—a rethinking of what individual action even means in a corporate-media-saturated state. In other films, he's occasionally been too cool for his own good. His passion comes out in dense networks of references and footnotes, but he'll rarely bring himself to—as a less scrupulous artist would say—go in for the kill. Something about Milgram's single-mindedness and drive liberates Almereyda. Milgram's prankishness, perhaps. (The conformity experiments had spiritual ties to *Candid Camera*.) Or his Jewishness. Or perhaps—contradicting my complaint above—Milgram's irritation at being perceived as too cool, even anti-human, when his moral urgency is plain.

Sarsgaard brings out every bit of tension between Milgram's humanism and clinical objectivity. Milgram studies the "teachers" (among them a movingly anguished John Leguizamo) as they writhe in indecision, reluctant to give higher jolts of electricity to a man in the next room crying out in pain (actually a performer on Milgram's payroll played by the mock-querulous comedian Jim Gaffigan): Milgram looks like a stereotypical Nazi scientist himself. Is he? You have to study Sarsgaard closely. Early in his career, the actor was almost too perfectly cast as the son of John Malkovich in *The Man in the Iron Mask*; he has the same weighty (but weirdly spaced) intonations and semi-hysterical head voice. But it takes real talent to suggest a mind so full of momentous ideas. Watch Sarsgaard press his case with Milgram's colleagues, bending toward them as if his soul were in his forehead. He's *so* in the world. Sarsgaard has a delightful partner in Winona Ryder as Milgram's wife, who can't wait to roll up her sleeves and feel what it's like to be shocked.

*Experimenter* is uncannily beautiful. Production designer Deana Sidney creates a palette of blue-grays and cool greens that's like a Platonic dream of social science before the counterculture blew out the walls. Bryan

**EXPERIMENTER**  
DIRECTED BY MICHAEL  
ALMEREYDA. MAGNOLIA  
PICTURES. PG-13.

**BRIDGE OF SPIES**  
DIRECTED BY  
STEVEN SPIELBERG.  
DREAMWORKS. PG-13.

**ROOM**  
DIRECTED BY  
LENNY ABRAHAMSON.  
ELEMENT PICTURES. R.



Senti's music finds a balance between scientific detachment and sorrow over the human capacity for cruelty, with a hint of Jewishness in the lachrymose violins. The movie's spell holds even when it becomes more diffuse in the second half, after Milgram is pilloried for not affirming human goodness and (allegedly) traumatizing his subjects. Accused of peddling a view of mankind as inherently evil, he's actually a "situationist." He believes that many people under some conditions could go against their morals if ordered to do so. But his conformity experiments showed differences among cultures. In *Experimenter*, a Dutchman—from a culture with "a history of defiance"—has an easier time than Americans in 1961 saying no. The movie ends with Milgram asserting we can be puppets but still have free will—which would be even freer if we could learn to "see the strings" on us.

Almeryda shows us the strings. I don't know why in two scenes an elephant follows Milgram down a corridor, but I'd like to believe he's suggesting viewers will accept *anything* as part of their natural obedience to a film director. In this case, he's right.

WITH HIS SOBER but stirring Cold War suspense film *Bridge of Spies*, Steven Spielberg continues his creative evolution from fatherless child to nervous father wondering (absent role models) if he's doing the right thing in the right way. His protagonist is James Donovan (Tom Hanks), a Brooklyn insurance lawyer tasked with defending a British-born Soviet citizen named Rudolf Abel (Mark Rylance) against the charge of spying for the Soviets. We see in the first (masterly) sequence that Abel is indeed a spy (no mystery), but Donovan wants the court to regard the man not as a traitor to be executed but a foreign soldier doing his duty—and bravely refusing to give up information. In this most nebulous of conflicts in a world that could nonetheless end in a nuclear instant, a figure like Abel would look mighty good strapped in the electric chair. But Donovan—though pilloried—stands tall.

The movie—written by Matt Charman and Ethan and Joel Coen, based on a true story—is explicitly a dramatization of personal integrity amid social madness. And Spielberg can be pretty explicit. But as *Lincoln* showed, he has a grown-up passion for the subtle arts of negotiation and persuasion. Donovan embodies the idea that no matter how corrupt the system, a principled, talented individual can set right the most battered and bloody ship of state. Even the government that dislikes and publicly dissociates itself from him sends him on a secret mission: trading Abel for a downed U-2 pilot (Austin Stowell), who disappointed his leaders by not committing

suicide before capture. The "bridge of spies" is where the exchange will take place, in a newly walled-off East Berlin.

Is it worth saying again that I miss Hanks the impudent comedian and wish he weren't so often the standard-bearer for American decency? Okay, I've said it. He's still impressive—he makes you feel Donovan's struggle to keep a clear head while stumbling (with a lousy cold) among shadowy antagonists in a frigid East Berlin, a maze of doublespeak interrupted by machine-gun fire at poor souls scaling the wall.

Spielberg evokes that free-floating malevolence superbly, though he founders when shoehorning in the plight of an American student arrested as a spy. In the large cast, Amy Ryan has disgracefully little to do as Donovan's wife, but various dour agents are convincing and Mikhail Gorevoy has a deliciously evocative Peter Lorre timbre as a KGB mastermind. It's Rylance who keeps *Bridge of Spies* standing. He gives a teeny,

witty, fabulously non-emotive performance, every line musical and slightly ironic—the irony being his forthright refusal to deceive in a world founded on lies. The poetic embodiment of fatalism, he is Donovan's closest ally in terms of integrity but his opposite when it comes to slogging away on behalf of lost causes.

I'LL HAVE MORE to say next issue about the much-anticipated *Room*, a film of intense close-ups with the breadth of a hurricane. It's told from the point of view of a 5-year-old (Jacob Tremblay, an instant star) whose mother (the phenomenally credible Brie Larson) has kept from him the knowledge that they're both prisoners of a psychopath in a shed. Despite a score with too many shimmering plinks, it's a breathtakingly clear-eyed portrait of a child's capacity—when guarded by a loving parent—to project warmth and even the illusion of space onto the most malignant environment. ■



THEATER / JESSE GREEN

## Not Throwing Away Their Shot

Why does nearly every Broadway show still release a cast album? As a long-term bet.



IT'S ONLY FITTING that Atlantic Records is releasing its recording of *Hamilton* in a variety of formats that, like the hit musical itself, rewind history. The download went on sale September 25; the CD comes out October 16. According to a tweet from Lin-Manuel Miranda, the show's author, there will also be an actual LP, that throwback medium embedding the topography of a score in warpy spirals of vinyl. The LP, should it happen, would return us nearly to the dawn of the original-cast-album era, when Decca managed to fit not quite all of *Oklahoma!* on six ten-inch double-sided 78-rpm platters.

As much as the technology has changed since 1943, the business model for original cast

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recordings—call them OCRs, but not soundtracks, please—has changed even more. In the old days, major labels bid for the rights to record and release major musicals. If flops were preserved, it was usually by accident: a record producer's unlucky bet on a horse that went lame. Now, even though major labels aren't much interested in musical theater unless, as with *Hamilton*, they perceive major crossover appeal, nearly everything is recorded, from spectaculars to duds to four-person Fringe revues. Last season tells the story. Fifteen musicals opened on Broadway between June 2014 and April 2015; though at least nine were flops, 14 got cast recordings. (The 15th, *Holler If Ya Hear Me*, was apparently recorded but never released.) This despite the likelihood that most of these cast recordings, even the ones whose shows are hits, will not prove profitable.

Two things are at play here. The major labels began to abandon Broadway when most OCRs, typically selling fewer than 50,000 copies, could no longer recoup the expenses of making and selling them. (Only five of last season's shows were recorded by big names like Sony, Universal, and Decca.) At the same time, the advent of digital music made production and distribution a much simpler process, available to almost anyone. As the major labels moved out, new boutique labels like Sh-K-Boom and PS Classics therefore emerged with novel business models to exploit the old niche and record the shows that would otherwise be lost to history.

It is still rather expensive to do that; according to Brian Drutman, a recording consultant specializing in musicals, a Broadway OCR costs about \$400,000 to make. But in many cases it's no longer the labels paying.

*Last season's 14 Broadway cast recordings are generally as good or bad as the shows they were made from. But not always. Ranked reviews below.*

## 1. FUN HOME (PS CLASSICS)

Even more intimate, and eventually more terrifying, than in the theater. Listen straight through. (Objectivity caveat:

I wrote the liner-notes essay—not that anyone reads liner notes anymore.)

## 2. THE KING AND I (DECCA BROADWAY)

Beautifully sung, and oh, that orchestra, here enhanced from the 29 in the pit to 40.

The fullest account to date of the score—including the amazing original dance music by Trude Rittmann.

## 3. HONEYMOON IN VEGAS (UNIVERSAL)

Jason Robert Brown's songs, channeling MGM circa 1950, swing and shine without the icky book and blah production that deadened them onstage.

## 4. ON THE TOWN (PS CLASSICS)

Joyful and solid and free of the production's sometimes annoying desperation to please.

## 5. THE LAST SHIP (UNIVERSAL MUSIC CLASSICS)

Sting's folk-oriented pop didn't dramatize the action of the gloomy musical very well but works beautifully as a kind of atmospheric singspiel on the OCR.

Bonus track: The composer sings an encore of "What Say You, Meg?"

## 6. THE VISIT (BROADWAY/YELLOW SOUND)

A bit sepulchral in the theater, Kander and Ebb's final score comes alive on the atmospheric OCR, with a chilling star turn by Chita Rivera.

## 7. SOMETHING ROTTEN (GHOSTLIGHT)

Like many big-fun spoofs—see also *The Producers* and *Spamalot*—the workmanlike score of this musical about the invention of musicals loses something on multiple hearings.

## 8. IT SHOULDA BEEN YOU (GHOSTLIGHT)

This mismatched-wedding-party musical seemed hopelessly dated in the theater, but guess what? Dated musicals can sound pretty good in your earbuds.

## 9. ON THE TWENTIETH CENTURY (PS CLASSICS)

Kristin Chenoweth adjusts her sensational comic performance perfectly for this revival cast recording, but nothing can make up for the vastly reduced orchestrations heard here.

## 10. AN AMERICAN IN PARIS (SONY/MASTERWORKS BROADWAY)

Jukebox musicals, even classy ones like this Gershwin pastiche, don't record well; reverting to their original form, the songs don't hang together. Stick with Ella.

## 11. SIDE SHOW (BROADWAY)

For those who love the screamie 1997 OCR, this more-disciplined revival cast album may seem like weak tea; for me, it's an improvement, which is not saying much.

## 12. GIGI (DMI SOUNDTRACKS)

This is what downloadable singles are for: a schizy show filled with botched numbers but a few gorgeous ones, too. You can get Victoria Clark's "Say a Prayer" for \$1.29.

## 13. FINDING NEVERLAND (REPUBLIC)

Bombast and treacle aren't a good combination, and they tend to curdle when preserved. Matthew Morrison belts up a storm, to no avail.

## 14. DOCTOR ZHIVAGO (BROADWAY)

This is what downloadable singles aren't for. Strictly for completists and students of the grotesque. (You will have to pay \$1.29 to discover for yourself whether the vomiting song has been included.)

Instead, the productions themselves are. A show that might ordinarily raise \$10 million for its Broadway capitalization might now, without much more effort, raise \$10.4 million, that extra fraction letting the producers pay for (and thus own) the OCR outright. Or a new label might syndicate the costs and profits among a group of investors. (The boutique label Broadway Records has its own variation on these paradigms.) The upside for the labels is obvious: Taking a fee or a royalty, they are much less exposed to risk. The upside for the producers (and for the artists as well) is that they have a permanent record of work they may love, or at any rate hope to profit by in the future. A show creamed by the New York critics might yet live on in high schools and regional theaters—if there's an OCR to spread the word.

This is good news for a show like *Tamar of the River*, which played barely a month Off-Off Broadway in 2013 despite one of the most extraordinary new scores in years. Now others can hear it and produce it. But is it good news for the rest of us that, say, *Doctor Zhivago*, last season's worst Broadway musical, is also preserved? There's a reason most flops flop, and sometimes all an OCR can do is show you why—forever. ■

## BOOKS / CHRISTIAN LORENTZEN

### Garth Hallberg's Nostalgia Bath The year's biggest debut.

IN AT LEAST EVERY extraliterary way, Garth Risk Hallberg's highly anticipated *City on Fire* arrives unmistakably marked as a very big deal. A \$2 million book contract; film rights sold on the spot; 911 pages with deluxe fictional facsimiles of a DIY zine, handwritten letters, and faux-whiskey-stained typewritten manuscripts; advance author profiles in *Vogue*, this magazine, and who knows where else—whatever the book tells us about itself or the state of the American novel, it says a lot about what sort of story New York publishers and Hollywood think they can sell. At first glance, the selling points would seem to be these: a panoramic social novel that's also historical, and therefore not under the burden of showing us the way we

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live now but instead delivering a nostalgic view of the way we may like to believe we lived then; a soft focus on both the perennially fascinating ultrarich as well as two bygone bohemia (punk rock and the downtown art scene); a dizzying, schizophrenic approach to point of view, with the narrative shifting among dozens of characters, some of them very minor, every few pages; a thrillerish structure pitting sad heroes against sadistic villains; and a recurring retreat at crucial moments from realism to Disneyland logic, right down to the wicked stepmother. As you can possibly tell, I'm not sold on *City on Fire*, but I'm curious to see if the reading public proves the enthusiasts right in their bet that this is the big novel—in its overflowing nostalgia, period-piece fetishization, and sheer physical bulk—everyone wants to read right now. As a book editor who read *City on Fire* on submission told me, “Christian, most people are more sentimental than you.”

For a book so long, the plot is pretty simple, if also a bit flimsy. *City on Fire* is overstuffed with characters, and the lines of action uniting them fray to the point of breaking. There is a girl in a coma, Samantha, shot in Central Park on New Year's Eve as 1976 turned to 1977. She's an NYU freshman enmeshed with a group of punks who live in a squat on East Third Street and call themselves the Post-Humanists. Their leader is Nicky Chaos, who has usurped the remains of a punk band, Ex Post Facto, from its former front man, Billy Three-Sticks, who has retreated from music into painting and a heroin habit. Billy is actually William Hamilton-Sweeney, scion of a family that's also been the object of a hostile takeover at the hands of his wicked stepmother, Felicia Gould, and her “demon brother,” Amory. In addition to framing William's father for insider trading, Amory is working in league with Nicky, who is having William followed by punk spies. Nicky is also at work on a project of his own, building a bomb with explosives stolen from Samantha's father, a fireworks maestro. A few questions mount: Will Samantha survive her coma? Who shot her? Why is the novel set in 1977? What do the tribulations of the hypercapitalist Hamilton-Sweeneys have to do with punk music? And why on earth is the novel so long?

The answer to the last question, I think, is that Hallberg has erected a few hundred pages' worth of a historical thriller in the interest of propping up reams and reams of backstories for characters major and minor. There is at first an appealing uptown-downtown, bridge-and-tunnel (and ferry) diversity to the cast, but it yields to a pervasive melancholy. Most of the backward-looking exposition homes in on the sources of their sadness, and in the case of the major



Interior page, *City on Fire*.

characters, these take the form of a lost parent. William Hamilton-Sweeney and his sister, Regan, lost their mother to a car accident in the early 1950s. Samantha's mother left her and her father to run off with her yoga instructor. Samantha's best friend, Charlie, an adopted Long Island teenager, lost his father to a heart attack, lending the family home a “forcefield of sadness.” *City on Fire* is billed as a 1970s punk fantasia, but the vibe of the novel is less punk than emo.

Then there's the book's take on punk itself. For Samantha and Charlie, sneaking into the city from Long Island to see shows on the Bowery, the music is a liberating force. There are many reverent mentions of Patti Smith, Television, the Ramones, Richard Hell and the Voidoids, the Sex Pistols, and the Clash. But Hallberg's original contribution is the story of Ex Post Facto. We're told the band was started as a lark by William and his friends the transvestite keyboardist Venus de Nylon, the bassist Nastanovich (if this isn't a reference to real-life Pavement member Bob Nastanovich, the coincidence is a bit glaring), and drummer Big Mike. For them, punk is a way to pass the time between more serious artistic pursuits (in William's case, his painting) and developing heroin habits. The band is taken over and its spirit betrayed by Nicky Chaos, a fan who offers them a practice space and turns out to be a cokehead careerist and a criminal specializing in arson, later emerging as something of a cult leader, with Samantha and Charlie joining his quasi-revolutionary cell, which lands Samantha in her coma and makes Charlie an accomplice to serial acts of arson—a far cry from the life he'd envisioned a few months earlier as a Bowie-listening high-school student resigned to someday becoming “an accountant or a podiatrist.” Charlie eventually breaks with Nicky after they set fire to a building inside which a dog is trapped. For the teenage runaway, killing an innocent animal is a step too far.

The novel's configuration of punk as a rich kid's hobby betrayed by violent thugs is a curious choice and less than convincing, both because it cuts against the varied class origins of actual punks (Patti Smith is the daughter of a waitress and a factory worker; Sid Vicious, a working-class high-school dropout; Richard Hell and Tom Verlaine middle-class, etc.) and because it undermines the romantic vision of punk Hallberg works to establish at the start. The rest of Hallberg's efforts to establish a period 1970s atmosphere are even more pained. It's hard to say that anything's exactly anachronistic, but many of the period details ostentatiously mentioned have the effect of weakening the book's claim to authenticity because they feel so generic and therefore secondhand. Back then, pedestrian traffic signals featured the words WALK and DON'T WALK; there were hookers on the street; it was a relatively new thing to have a color television, and there were commercials for popular processed foods like Velveeta cheese; quaaludes were available; buildings in Hell's Kitchen looked like they'd been hit by bombs and were occupied by Hells Angels; muggings were a regular hazard. References to iconic works of the time—*Taxi Driver*, *The French Connection*, John le Carré's novels—only serve to remind us that we're not really there.

Centered as it is on a wealthy family's Central Park penthouse, on the one hand, and a dingy downtown squat on the other, Hallberg's vision of 1977 Manhattan is drenched in nostalgia, a ramshackle pastiche—part potboiler, part soap opera, and, in largest part, a close study of a handful of characters (not to mention an array of stock characters: an alcoholic journalist, a plucky gallery assistant, a crippled Polish cop just a few weeks from retirement who stays on the job to crack one last case), an exercise in the novel as group-therapy session. Strangely, for a story told from so many points of view, the narrative voice is uniform throughout, jaunty and knowing, peppered with \$5 words and rhetorical questions, but it's never very funny and never comes very close to the consciousness of whatever character it's inhabiting at any given time. What the characters have in common is a pervasive ennui. Containing these people inside a thriller requires many violations of logic and resorts to cliché. Ultimately, Hallberg is trying to have it too many ways. There's a strong tradition of social novels of New York City—from William Dean Howells's *A Hazard of New Fortunes* and the novels of Edith Wharton to DeLillo's *Underworld* and the novels of Jonathan Lethem—built on near overdoses of naturalistic detail. Hallberg has tried to yoke the genre to what one character calls a "fairy tale."



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Edited by Jennifer Vineyard

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—Matthew Weiner



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*“I’m not really interested in having my name on buildings.”*



**George Lucas**



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**Steve Martin**

*“I was thinking the city of Manhattan.”*

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*“I’ve taken meetings about hosting a late-night talk show. There would be alcohol. I would drink on-camera and my guests would have to drink on-camera. Kind of like Watch What Happens:*

*Live, but a bigger studio, because I’ve done that show, and I was drunk by the time we finished.”*

—Retta



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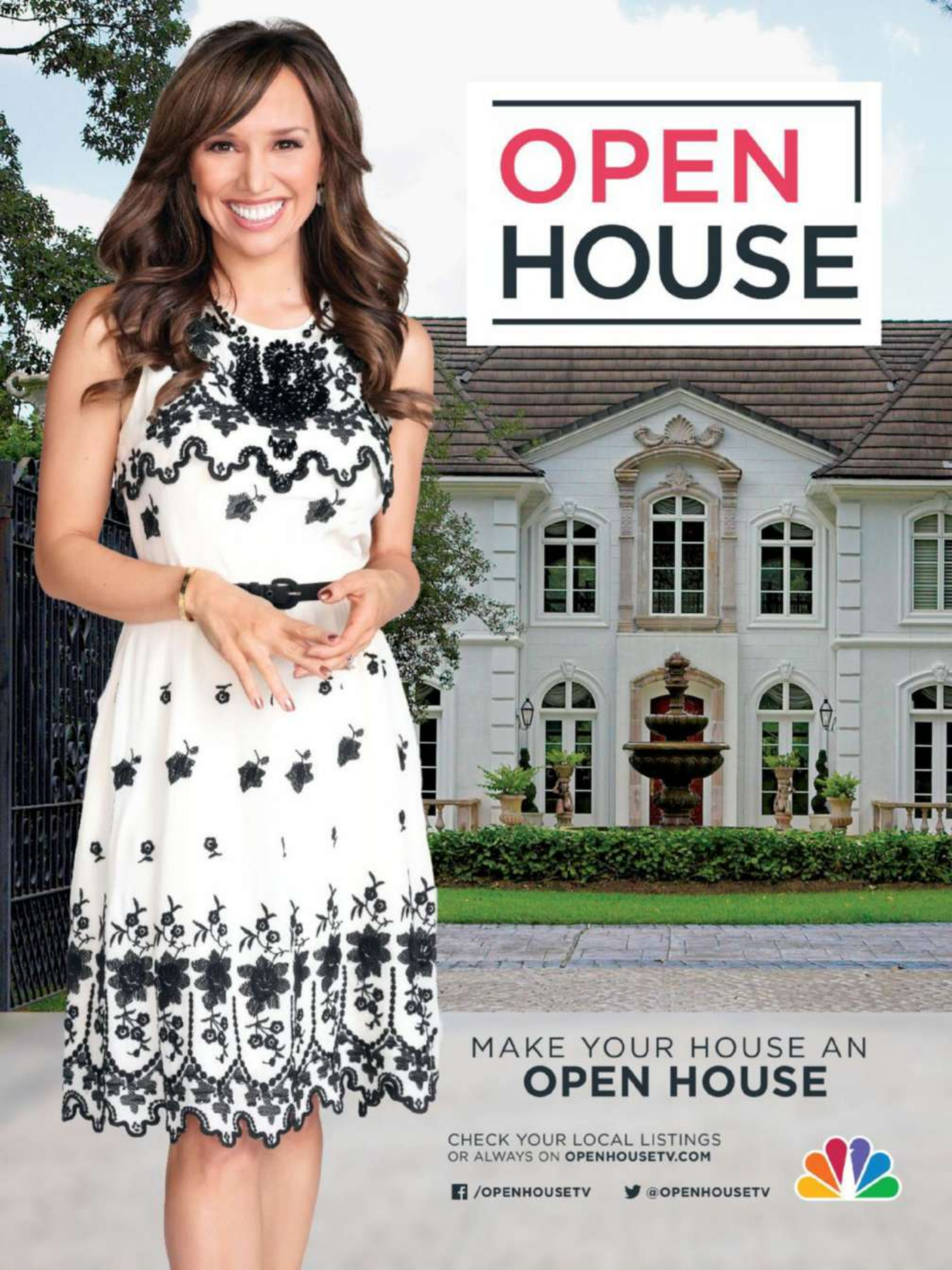
**“I think the reward for sticking with the Republican debates until the 11 o’clock hour was hearing Jeb Bush suggest Margaret Thatcher be on our American currency.”**

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## 1. Watch American Horror Story: Hotel

*Fifth season, still a fright.*

FX, October 7 at 10 p.m.

The horror anthology returns with a narratively (and geographically) tighter focus: the Hotel Cortez in L.A., owned by guest star Lady Gaga and possibly the center of action for the mysterious Ten Commandments Killer. Look for connections between new stories and earlier ones: The Murder House from season one makes a cameo, along with regulars like Kathy Bates, Angela Bassett, and Sarah Paulson.

MATT ZOLLER SEITZ

POP

## 2. Listen to Chvrches' Every Open Eye

*Like Pat Benatar in another galaxy.*

Glassnote.

This Scottish synth-pop trio stormed the scene about two years ago with their sleek, infectious debut. Their latest improves on that winning formula, marrying the aerodynamic sheen of modern electronic music with the huge, open-hearted hooks of '80s rock.

LINDSAY ZOLADZ

ART

## 3. See Maureen Gallace

*Stunning simplicity.*

303 Gallery, through October 31.

For years, even art's muckety-mucks have been unable to explain Maureen Gallace's simple depictions and painterly techniques. Long known for juicy images of beaches, seascapes, barns, flowers, and the like, Gallace here is beautifully in touch with the deepest aspects of observation and

light-infused color; her new work stands on its own, noble, to be savored.

JERRY SALTZ

THEATER

## 4. See Hamlet

*Starring an especially sweet prince.*

See [ntlive.nationaltheatre.org.uk](http://ntlive.nationaltheatre.org.uk) for venues; October 15 at 7 p.m.

For some, Lyndsey Turner's direction is the draw that has turned the Barbican's *Hamlet* into London's hottest ticket this fall; for others, it's more likely the star, Benedict Cumberbatch. The run is basically sold out, and the theater is 3,500 miles away, so catch the National Theatre's live broadcast.

JESSE GREEN

POP

## 5. Listen to Demi Lovato's Confident

*Pop conqueror.*

Hollywood/Island, October 16.

This aptly titled album just might be the fall's best pop. Take a listen to the first two singles: the slinky earworm "Cool for the Summer" and the title song, a boisterous Max Martin production about letting your freak flag fly high.

MOVIES

## 6. See The Final Girls

*Don't go up that staircase!*

In theaters October 9.

Ever since Carol Clover ID'd the archetype in her 1991 book *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, the idea of the "final girl"—the one who faces the monster after all her friends have been hacked up—has been a cliché. It's an archetype that comes in for a ribbing in this macabre meta-horror comedy, in which a high-school senior is whisked back in time

to an '80s slasher movie starring a handful of potential "final girls," among them her mother. Who will remain intact?

DAVID EDELSTEIN

#### TV

### 7. Watch Fargo

*It's a doozie.*

FX, October 12 at 10 p.m.

Season one had its guilty pleasures (we miss you, Billy Bob Thornton!), but *Fargo* digs deeper in season two, giving us Solverson-family history, the Sioux Falls incident, and new cast members like Kirsten Dunst, Patrick Wilson, and Ted Danson.

#### OPERA

### 8. Hear Elektra

*Watch the baton.*

Carnegie Hall, October 21.

As the Philharmonic mulls its future, the city is caught in a pincer of conductorial excitement. Shortly after Yannick Nézet-Séguin finishes *Otello* at the Met, Andris Nelsons brings his Boston Symphony Orchestra for another operatic tour de force. Christine Goerke headlines a big-lunged cast for this concert performance.

JUSTIN DAVIDSON

#### MOVIES

### 9. See Everest

*Reaching great heights.*

In theaters.

Imax-worthy vistas notwithstanding, this latest dramatization of the 1996 catastrophe portrayed in Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air* is notable for its tragic intimacy. The Icelandic director Baltasar Kormákur doesn't lose sight of the real, small, sad story at his big movie's heart.

BILGE EBIRI

#### BOOKS

### 10. Read Sloane Crosley's The Clasp

*The genuine article.*

Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

The breezy New York essayist hasn't radically altered her voice in transit to fiction. That's good, because Crosley's skittery wit and polished warmth make her first novel worthy of its meta-fictional basis, de Maupassant's "The Necklace."

BORIS KACHKA

#### THEATER

### 11. See The Christians

*A megachurch worth attending.*

Playwrights Horizons, through October 11.

Lucas Hnath's good-strange new play, about a pastor who no longer believes in hell, is most extraordinary in the way it wrestles seriously with a fundamental (not just a fundamentalist) question: How do we change and yet remain faithful?

J.G.

#### POP

### 12. See Majical Cloudz

*Make eye contact.*

National Sawdust, October 21.

The Montreal electropop duo have one of the simplest and most affecting live shows currently touring; the airy and pristine new National Sawdust space should be the perfect backdrop for this musical theater of vulnerability.

L.Z.

Now Through  
October 18



Illustration by Jamie Lee Reardin © 2015

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Jonathan Walker  
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Fascinated by a serial killer's poems to his victims, Nancy sets out to find him. When she discovers herself in his basement she likes it.

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## MOVIES

### 13. **See** Rocco and His Brothers

*Remarkable restoration.*

Film Forum, October 9 through 29.

As part of its 25th anniversary, Milestone presents Luchino Visconti's rare 1960 epic, a madly ambitious take on Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* that's more operatic (and arguably less successful) than his masterpiece, *The Leopard*. But you need to see it to understand the bar Visconti set for those passionate Italian-American movie buffs Scorsese and Coppola.

D.E.



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- Luxuriate in** ➡ "Terrence Loves You," a melodramatic, Bowie-referencing, piano-driven bummer

## CLASSICAL MUSIC

### 14. **Hear** Mark Padmore

*Singularly soulful music.*

Alice Tully Hall, October 14 through 17.

With his limpid voice, crystalline diction, and vast emotive range, tenor Mark Padmore suffuses Schubert's songs with pain and bliss; he'll perform the composer's three song cycles at the White Light Festival.

J.D.

## TV

### 15. **Watch** Red Oaks

*Here come the popped collars.*

Amazon, October 9.

David Gordon Green directed this ten-episode series set at a country club in 1985, where a young assistant tennis pro is spending his final summer before college; the slam-dunk cast includes Richard Kind and Jennifer Grey as the hero's parents, plus Paul Reiser as a yuppie corporate raider.

M.Z.S.

## BOOKS

### 16. **Read** Salman Rushdie

*Reconsider the serial tweeter.*

Random House.

In *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-eight Nights*, one of the godfathers of hyperrealism has his strongest novel in years: a clever, pomomystical triptych stretching back to Andalusia and forward to a distant utopian future.

B.K.

## ART

17. **See** Keltie Ferris

*Painterly reflexes engaged.*

Mitchell-Innes & Nash, through October 17.

Ferris burst onto the New York painting scene with Day-Glo canvases that were perfect crosses between hazy 1970s color-field painting, pixelated digital space breaking up and reforming, and painterly abstraction; then she seemed to plateau a bit. That temporary stall is behind her; Ferris is really simmering-to-boil in this new show. J.S.

## TV

18. **Watch** Billy on the Street

*Follow that tall, loud man!*

TruTV, October 8 at 10:30 p.m.

Everyone's favorite street-corner accoster is back, along with more high-profile guests (Tina Fey!). For a dollar: Do you agree that *Billy on the Street* is weird and wonderful and unlike anything else? Yes! MARGARET LYONS

## THEATER

19. **See** The Pirates of Penzance

*The very model of an operetta.*

New York City Center, October 15 and 16.

Gilbert's pearls of inconsequence and Sullivan's sublime melodies usually get buried under decades of dull performance clichés. Expect more from MasterVoices and the Orchestra of St. Luke's, with stars from opera and Broadway, when they serve up the spoof of 19th-century notions of duty. J.G.

### The Best-Translated Lines From 'Toyt fun a Seylsman,' Chosen by Jesse Green

*The loose Yiddish translation of Death of a Salesman runs at the Castillo Theater through November 22.*

- |                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. He's not to be allowed to fall in his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must finally be paid to such a person. | Men darf nisht derlozn er zol oysgeyn vi an eynzamer alter hunt. Men muz zikh umkukn. Achtung gebn af'im.   |
| 2. The jungle is dark but full of diamonds.                                                                                 | In der vildernisht iz fintster, ober ful mitblishtshendike diamantn.                                        |
| 3. Nobody dast blame this man. A salesman is got to dream, boy, it comes with the territory.                                | Azoy iz es. A seylsman muz hobn a kholem. Dos gezt mit der profesie.                                        |
| 4. You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away—a man is not a piece of fruit.                                          | Du konst nisht oyfesn amarants un aroysvarfn dem sholekhts. A mentsh iz nisht keyn farfoylte shtikl frukht. |

## ART

20. **See** Warlimpirrnga Tjapaltjarri

*One of the best shows of the year.*

Salon 94, through October 24.

Vanishing points of infinite amplitude, waving fields of concentric lines at intervals that are cos-

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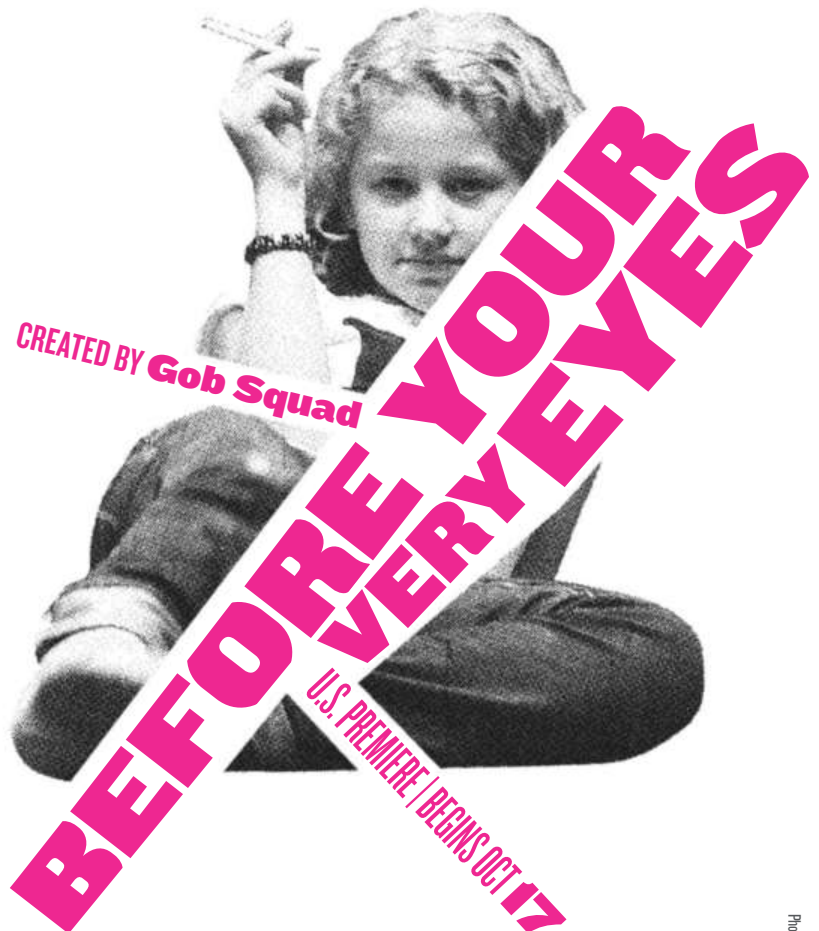


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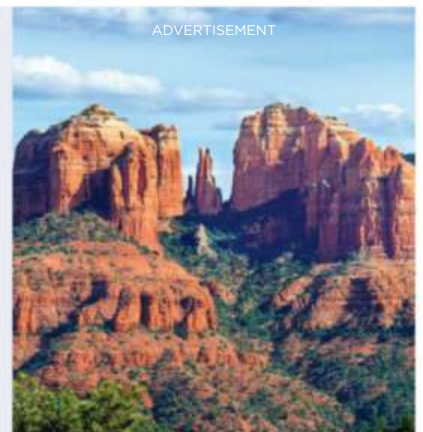
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mically calibrated: These are the optical-psyche effects of the gorgeously mysterious works by Aboriginal painter Warlimpirrnga Tjapaltjarri, one of Australia's greatest—maybe one of the world's. Sometimes it takes simple paintings like these, abstract images rendered meticulously with an unfixed system, to make us slow down and take notice. J.S.

### MOVIES

## 21. See Diaries, Notes and Sketches

*First-person filmmaking.*

BAMcinémathèque, October 7 through 14.

Thanks to digital video, "diary" films are now a cinch to make, but as BAM's series makes clear, that wasn't always so. Explore this exhilarating tradition onscreen, from Ed Pincus's hugely influential *Diaries* (1982) to Jonas Mekas's five-hour, 30-year *As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty*. D.E.

### BOOKS

## 22. Read The Art of Language Invention

*Speak like Khaleesi.*

Penguin Random House.

Linguist David J. Peterson has created dozens of languages for television and film, most famously on *Game of Thrones*. He shares his trade secrets and tips for inventing and "evolving" these fake tongues so they sound natural.

### DANCE

## 23. See Dream'd in a Dream

*East meets West.*

BAM Harvey Theater, October 7 through 10.

DanceMotion USA lets a few lucky choreographers and their dancers work with far-flung, unlikely creative bedfellows; the latest fruit of the program arrives in this lively new work performed by Séan Curran's company, accompanied by Kyrgyz folk musicians. REBECCA MILZOFF

### CLASSICAL MUSIC

## 24. Hear The Scheherazade Initiative

*For just one night.*

Carnegie Hall, October 19.

Legendary storyteller Scheherazade gives her name to an organization that fights violence against women—sometimes with music, as at this all-star concert of both Ravel's and Rimsky-Korsakov's versions of *Scheherazade*. J.D.

### TV

## 25. Watch Manhattan

*It's the bomb.*

WGN, October 13 at 9 p.m.

Even though you know how this show will end, the race to build the bomb makes for engrossing television. Season two, anchored by John Benjamin Hickey's unhinged performance, gives a tour of minds both brilliant and paranoid; you'll start to believe one can't exist without the other.

### SOLUTION TO LAST ISSUE'S PUZZLE

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
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The Five Star Professional research team contacted thousands of recent homebuyers, consumers and industry experts to identify New York City-area service professionals who stand out in their industry and community. Award candidates for the Five Star award are brought forward based on consumer evaluations, peer nominations and/or based on superior industry credentials (based on experience and historical production).

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This year's winners are listed and profiled in the following pages. They can also be found, along with more on our research methodology, on our website at [FiveStarProfessional.com](http://FiveStarProfessional.com).

### Research Disclosures

- The 2015 Five Star Real Estate Agents, Mortgage Professionals and Home/Auto Insurance Professionals do not pay a fee to be included in the research or the final list.
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## N. Lorraine Baker

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**Deborah L. Sabec**

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All award winners are sorted by city and listed alphabetically by last name.

### All Areas

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Maria Carr · Douglas Elliman Real Estate  
Maria Fermin · EXIT Realty Success  
Armen Meschian · CORE Group Marketing  
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Debra Bondy · Urban Compass  
Jessica Buchman · The Corcoran Group  
Delton Cheng · CENTURY 21 Homefront  
Audrey Edwards · Brown Harris Stevens  
Angela Friedman · Fillmore Real Estate  
Peter Grazioli · Halstead Property  
Patrick Ben Hayoun · MNS  
Susan Little · The Corcoran Group  
Marie McIntyre · Brooklyn Properties of 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Terry Naini · TOWN Residential  
Michael Napolitano · RE/MAX Metro  
**Oleg Napolitsky · Abacus Properties** [Page 3](#)  
Deborah Lee Rieders · The Corcoran Group  
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Laura Rozos · The Corcoran Group  
Lesley Semmelhack · Corcoran Group Real Estate  
Gerard Splendore · Halstead Property  
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Peter Angelas · Better Homes and Gardens Real Estate  
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Dawn Frojen · Halstead Property  
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Frances Langbecker · Douglas Elliman Real Estate  
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Vito Angelo · RE/MAX  
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Grant Braswell · Keller Williams Realty NYC  
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Kerry DeBellis · RealEstateSINY.com  
**Lida Drummond · Douglas Elliman Real Estate** [Page 3](#)  
Milton Elbogen · Corcoran Group Real Estate

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Jared Lafrenais · Douglas Elliman Real Estate  
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### Queens

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Eamonn Carr · Keller Williams Realty  
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Five Star Professional surveyed more than 68,600 New York City-area homeowners. The final list of 2015 New York City Five Star Mortgage Professionals is a select group, representing less than 1 percent of mortgage professionals in the area. Evaluations were collected by mail, phone and online at [www.fivestarpromotional.com/homesurvey](http://www.fivestarpromotional.com/homesurvey). In order to be considered for the award, candidates are evaluated on five evaluation and eligibility criteria: 1. Received a qualifying client satisfaction rating; 2. Satisfied the applicable state licensing requirements; 3. Actively employed as a licensed professional for a minimum of three years; 4. Favorable regulatory and complaint history review; 5. Satisfied minimum client volume or production on a one-year and three-year basis (number and volume of transactions or number of client households served).

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Stan Aleshin · Mortgage Master

Samer Allan · Chase Mortgage

**Yuriy Belkovskyy · JPMorgan Chase** Page 5

John Gnisci · Citibank

Ruben Gurgov · First Meridian Mortgage

James Kroll · Mortgage Master

**Melora Love · Wells Fargo Home Mortgage** Page 5

Dan Marcuccio · Citibank

**Frank Micali · Citibank** Page 5

Olga Savelov · Sterling National Bank

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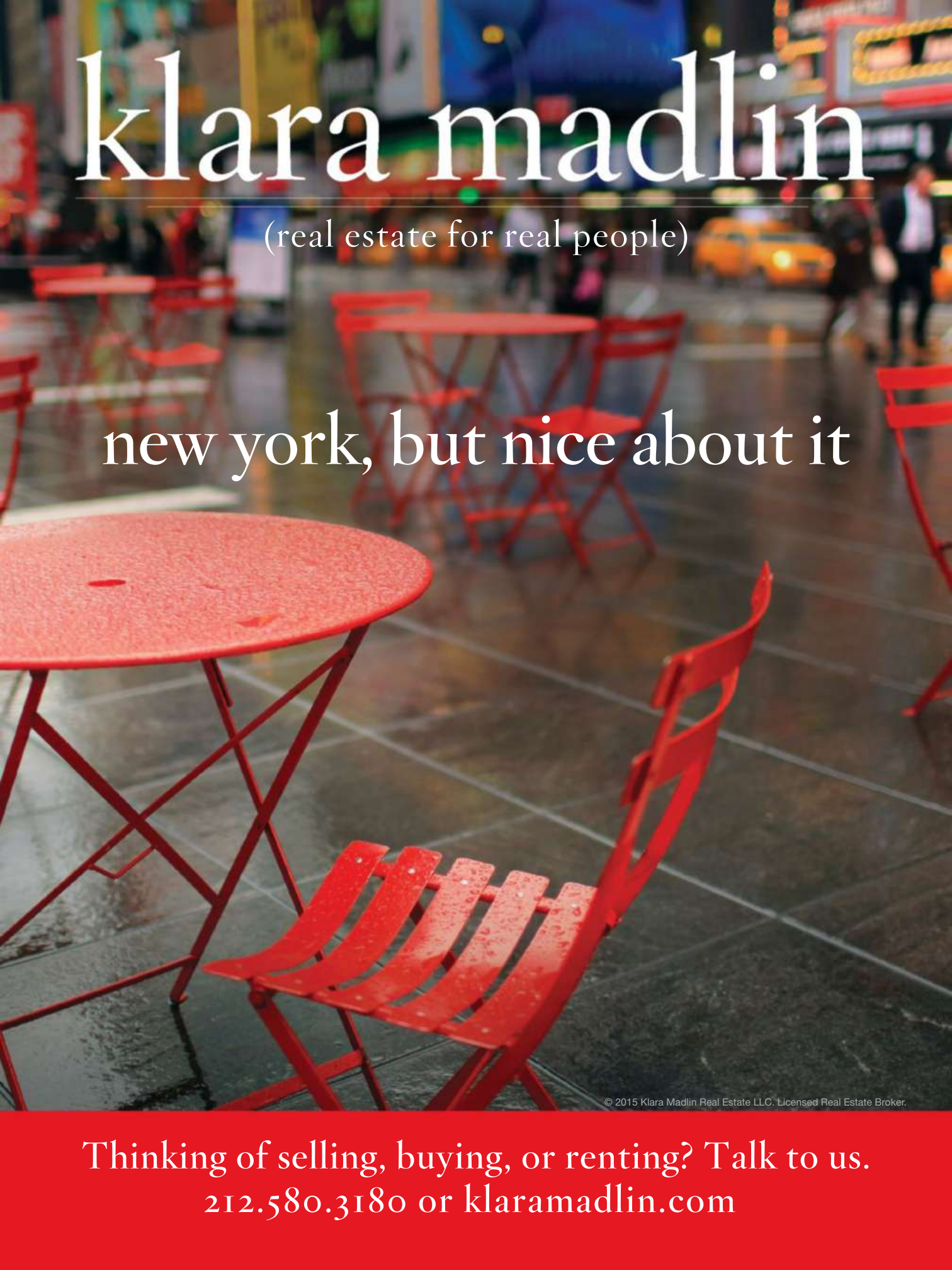
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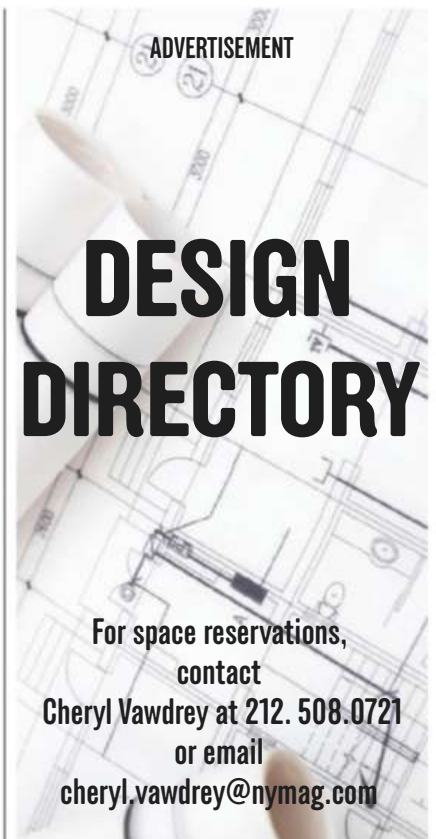
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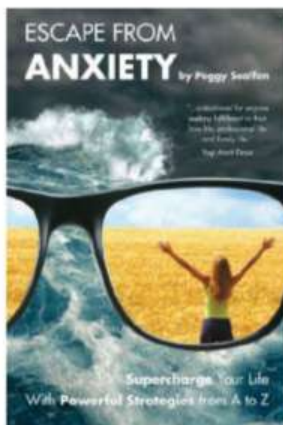
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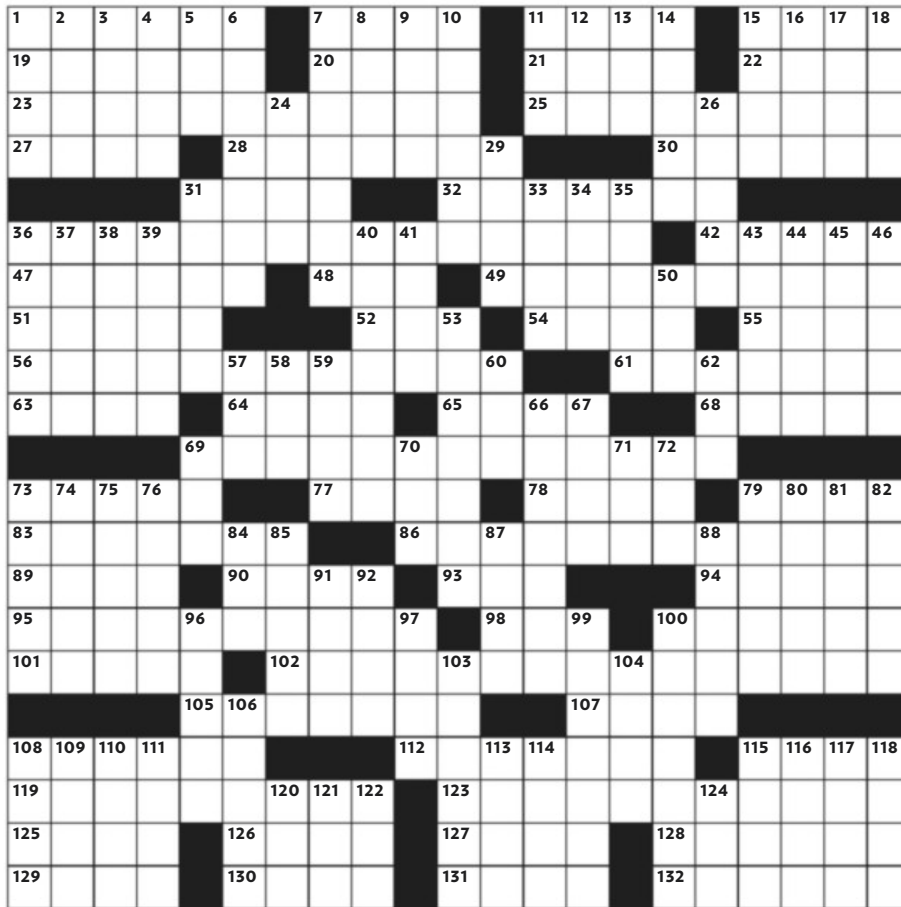
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# Playbill Omissions

New York Crossword by Cathy Allis



## Across

- 1 Tarzan type
- 7 "Phooey!"
- 11 Still sleeping
- 15 Thick Japanese noodle
- 19 Drive analyzed by Freud
- 20 Cinco + tres
- 21 Hold sway
- 22 Desert "monster"
- 23 "(The) Volume Penned by a Dummy?"
- 25 "Tree-Woman Who Gives Me Cones?"
- 27 Mrs. Shakespeare
- 28 Horn & Hardart eatery
- 30 Takes by force
- 31 Dennis the Menace's dog
- 32 Reason for extra innings
- 36 "(The) Alternative to an 'Oxford' Education?"
- 42 Hub with the code BOS
- 47 Part of an Anytown, USA, address
- 48 One in the sales biz
- 49 "Stockings in the Toy Aisle?"
- 51 Bill Clinton's deputy chief of staff Harold
- 52 Rx writer
- 54 Lotion additive

- 55 Bowl of chips, maybe
- 56 "Ink on a Fish Egg?"
- 61 Had a longing
- 63 Towel pronoun
- 64 Ancient Cuzco native
- 65 PBJ alternatives
- 68 Bushed
- 69 "Bug Bein' Naughty?"
- 73 Rush of water
- 77 It shares hubs with Israil
- 78 "Spamalot" creator Idle
- 79 Pollux or Polaris
- 83 Entrées with crusts
- 86 "Saga of the Anti-Prohibitionists?"
- 89 "Frozen" snow queen
- 90 American territory in the Pacific
- 93 King, à la Saint Louis
- 94 Scoped out for robbery
- 95 "Small Group of Cardinals: the Play?"
- 98 Nutrition-guideline fig.
- 100 Geological epoch
- 101 Reeves of "The Matrix"
- 102 "Neckwear Won't Change Down the Road?"
- 105 Toronto stadium, formerly
- 107 Monogram ltr.

- 108 Daisy variety
- 112 Shipping tycoon Aristotle
- 115 Stuff in stout
- 119 "Twisted 'Droids"?
- 123 "Hurry Up With That 'Hit Sound'?"
- 125 It may be pitched to people
- 126 Double-reed instrument
- 127 Salinger title girl
- 128 "I've found it!"
- 129 "Eye of \_\_\_\_ and toe of frog ..." ("Macbeth" witch)
- 130 Bowed
- 131 Senate Minority Leader Harry
- 132 Make numb

## Down

- 1 Jessica of TV's "Dark Angel"
- 2 Zero-spin subatomic particle
- 3 Black, poetically
- 4 Karaoke-machine part
- 5 Hoopla
- 6 Like some car insurance
- 7 Cheer on
- 8 Height: prefix
- 9 Shoe brand \_\_\_\_ McAn
- 10 Musically named Hyundai
- 11 Equip for combat
- 12 Follow bullish advice

- 13 Ferrell film turned Broadway musical
- 14 Belief in God through reason
- 15 Aptly named citrus
- 16 Actress Cameron
- 17 Shoppe-sign word
- 18 Those opposed
- 24 Flub
- 26 Fishing-rod attachments
- 29 Fey of comedy
- 31 Vino \_\_\_\_ (It. "red wine")
- 33 Icelandic literary work
- 34 British hoosegow
- 35 Metallic mix
- 36 Seven Sisters college
- 37 Secret stash
- 38 Trail trekker
- 39 Humdingers
- 40 Feature of some catfish and hawks
- 41 Bit of a cuppa
- 43 Midway Airport alternative
- 44 Fixin' to
- 45 Daisylike flower
- 46 Indigent
- 50 Jeans brand
- 53 Deep-dish fruit dessert
- 57 Austrian article "a"
- 58 Big-bang cause
- 59 High point
- 60 Costa Brava "Bravo!"
- 62 Grain bristle
- 66 Err on \_\_\_\_ of caution
- 67 Kolkata wrap
- 69 Yellowfin tuna
- 70 Wood cutter
- 71 YouTube clip, for short
- 72 Kind of pick or pack
- 73 Command to Rover
- 74 Rex Stout's sleuth Nero
- 75 Between cruise stops
- 76 Give rise to
- 79 Actor Keach
- 80 "We're off \_\_\_\_ the Wizard ..."
- 81 Gladiators' venue
- 82 Rental-truck company
- 84 Psyche component
- 85 Full of lather
- 87 Singer Amos or actress Spelling
- 88 "Ivanhoe" author
- 91 Make \_\_\_\_ dash for
- 92 Exec-to-staff note
- 96 Blowing in strong bursts, as wind
- 97 Pixar-title fish
- 99 Licorice-like flavoring source
- 100 Lived
- 103 Less relaxed
- 104 Sir Geraint's lady
- 106 "Shish" dish
- 108 It may be tanned
- 109 It may be tanned
- 110 Fresh way to start
- 111 32-card game
- 113 Basilica recess
- 114 Trucker's rig
- 115 Wife of Zeus
- 116 Commentary page, briefly
- 117 Nudge
- 118 "Ugly Duckling", eventually
- 120 U.K. award
- 121 Whole lot
- 122 Site for a shoot
- 124 Color property



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# THE APPROVAL MATRIX

Our deliberately oversimplified guide to who falls where on our taste hierarchies.

## HIGHBROW



**Big gulp:** Coca-Cola spent more than \$100 million on sham "health research."



An artwork by Mimsy showing **stuffed animals** dressed in black ISIS garb was taken down by London police because of security concerns.



The **aggressively nonsensical** *Fondly*, Collette Richland at the New York Theatre Workshop.



The Off Broadway musical *Daddy Long Legs* **stumbles** over its source material.



Bernie Sanders promises to be "an arts president." More **pinko artists!**



This year, New York City got **more** MacArthur geniuses than three-star Michelin restaurants.



There's **water** on Mars!



Just because Cecile Richards looks a bit like **Claire Underwood** doesn't mean she doesn't earn her salary, Republicans.



Volkswagen fucks up our **Fahrvergnügen**.



The Secret Service **fished** around in Utah congressman Jason Chaffetz's personnel file to get back at him.

People with **\$1.5 billion** get no respect these days. Making it onto the Forbes 400 now starts at a \$1.7 billion, up \$150 million from a year ago.



Did the pope **really** have to meet with Kim Davis?

A recent study in the *Journal of Communication* showed that when you tweet from your phone, you're more egocentric. So stick to taking **selfies**.



Patti Smith's memoir-sequel, *M Train*, shaggier and **weirder** than *Just Kids* but, on the plus side, not about New York in the '70s.



*Thirteen Ways of Looking*, a quartet of **concise** and contemporary stories from Colum McCann. Also not about New York in the '70s.



Adrienne Truscott's **rape riff** *Asking for It*.



Jack Ferver's **feverish** take on rich-girl envy, *Chambre*, at the New Museum.



Carrie Brownstein's sparse and touching **grrrl-rock** (pre-*Portlandia*) coming-of-age memoir, *Hunger Makes Me a Modern Girl*.

Opening soon: the **new** St. Ann's Warehouse!

## DESPICABLE



Matt Damon says actors should keep sexuality private to preserve their **mystery**.



Lena Dunham has **outsourced** her tweeting to protect herself.



The out-of-date **pop-culture camp** references on *Scream Queens*.



Whole Foods has been selling **chèvre** derived from goats raised by prison labor. It was unclear what the goats were in for.



That idiot kid who video-recorded himself walking over the subway tracks when he was on the wrong platform, demanding, "Make that shit go **viral**, bitch!"



Russia created a tiny **cockroach-robot** spy. It replaces the drunken-babushka robot they'd previously been deploying, not as effectively.



John Stamos's *Grandfathered* needs **early retirement**.



At the art-fashion event *MOVE!* in the **otherwise banal** Winter Garden of Brookfield Place, they'll help you learn to cross-dress.



The zine **Gayletter's** Susan Sarandon cover.



*South Park's* thumpin' **Trump episode**.



Nicki Minaj's planned ABC family sitcom is based on her pre-social-media childhood in Queens. (Suggestion: Make her best friend a **talking Anaconda** named Hannah Montana.)



Peaches's thumpin' first album in six years: **Rub**.



New Order's slightly less-thumpin' first album in a decade: **Music Complete**.



Blake Lively's **deadly** *Kinfolk*-lite website Preserve goes dark.



Katy Perry's Brazilian superfan (hey, she handled it **better** than Patti LaBelle).

## BRILLIANT

## LOWBROW

PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF COCA-COLA (COKE); JOAN MARCUS (FONDLY); WIKICOMMONS (RICHARDS); JEREMY DANIEL (DADDY LONG LEGS); PHIL ROEDER/FILICKR (SANDERS); COURTESY OF THE JOHN D. & CATHERINE T. MACARTHUR FOUNDATION (GENIUSES); MRS. TRUSCOTT/TWITTER (TRUSCOTT); PATRICK MCMULLAN (BROWNSTEIN); MINAJ LIVELY; MOVEARTANDFASHION/INSTAGRAM (MOVE); LENA DUNHAM/INSTAGRAM (DUNHAM); STEVE DIETL/COURTESY OF FOX (SCREAM QUEENS); COURTESY OF FOX (GRANDFATHERED); ISRAEL WILLIAMS/INSTAGRAM (SUBWAY WALK)



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